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THREE FARMS

JOHN MÄTTER

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THREE FARMS

BY

JOHN MÄTTER
Author of "Once"

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1913

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PROVENCE

THE DESIRE

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I

A DAY IN PARIS

I HAVE come south after a day in Paris. It seems to me now, sitting late in this still room above the moon-flooded garden, to have been a day unreal, a dream, a page from the "Arabian Nights." What did I in Paris? Memory has that I entered the Louvre—to one who goes infrequently within her walls, can there be shame in owning to a half-day in the Treasure House of the city? I remember polished motors and blanketed horses without, and within prosperous persons, and here and there the shrunken poor seeking warmth about the floor registers or timidly solitary on the benches, all furtive-eyed, alert against authority. What had the poor with Art? I stood beside a beldam, bent and trembling, before the Winged Victory. The exultant stone rose high above us; lightly, gloriously poised, all but fluttering, it held the grandmama of the ragged cape and myself in a long silence. When, at last,

she took breath sharply between tight lips, our elbows rubbed, and she started; then with a murmur went down the stairs.

I did not seek out the Venus. It is not best in certain moods to force a way to her pedestal. Does a lover compel the caress that lingers? My memories of her are gracious: a gleam, swift and vanishing, accidental, the length of a clogged corridor, and then the unhurried approach, gleam after preparative gleam, until is offered without reserve the fullness of unquelled beauty.

Dusk led me to a café. I entered behind two carters and found a place against the wall. In the interval of ordering and receiving there is excellent opportunity for reflection in any place of eating; particularly so, perhaps, in a café of Paris. The white-girded waiter, active as a terrier, suavely learned my modest desire for chocolate and cakes, and I looked about me. Three bearded men played decorously at dominoes in a corner; it seemed a childish pursuit for potential brigands. Close seated at my side were a man and woman. They sipped at leisure from glasses of steaming stuff and their shoulders met while he turned the pages of a comic paper and whispered in her ear. One pair of hands was not to be seen, and soon an arm

would be around a waist. In the doorway, a waiter, quieted by hunger, chewed on a sandwich. It seemed in ill tune with the proceedings on my left and I turned to the window. A demi-mondaine passing with exact stride caught my unprepared eyes. She searched them out, professionally and impersonally, as a thief might pockets, and finding naught, regarded me no longer. At that moment she would have spat upon me as freely as upon the cobbles. In every business, Demi-Mondaine, there is to-morrow to consider. No doubt you know that better than I. One should rather rejoice that the ashes of your spirit yet hold a spark of unconcern.

An endless stream of persons went by my window. To the listless and metaphor seeking mind, how does this uninterrupted current suggest a river! Though the mind be torpid, it must be courageous to follow the figure. For rivers flow to the sea and their identity is lost; and this tributary flows, —where? . . . The season was January; despite the blue of the sky, the air pierced, so I could not with comfort sit on the sidewalk in the sawdust at one of the little round tables and philosophize as does the fisherman who hangs his legs over the water upon which he casts. I was a distance re-

moved and my line must be thrown from afar. For the moment this compulsory method afforded a wider view up and down the fishing grounds.

I do not understand Paris. There is nothing remarkable about the statement; I have met other people who admitted as much. Excessive London and ordered Berlin and confined New York are to be apprehended, at least piece by piece, but Paris to me is a place of elusive spirit not to be learned by guidebook and rote. One can find what one desires from the depths to the heights. You see this; I, that. A mirror is Paris, pitilessly reflecting the soul of the adventurous being who would gaze thereon.

This I am sure of: it is the city that does effectually close to my ears the calling music of the open country. And so to-night I rejoice to be sitting in this room above the garden of moonlight, listening to the singing sea beyond the wall.

II

THE BEGINNING

MENTONE is delightful; the guidebooks tell you that, the winter visitors, and best of all, the fishermen on the rocks. I will hear nothing to the contrary. But when one has steeped for days in the sunshine, when one comes to know the successive costumes of the beautifully gowned women, the sonorous toot of each glittering automobile; when the vendor of newspapers lifts his hat every morning and the leashed dogs wag tails in passing and even the plumed palms nod: above all, when one is a farmer by nature, then—

For long days I debated the matter with myself. If the sun fell strong and soaking on my chair, I did not, perhaps, pursue the thought ardently. The sunlight of Provence so simplifies life! Here was I, there the flat, blue Mediterranean, and yonder the hills picked out against a sky that matched the sea for color. Beyond them somewhere was another world, vague, turbulent, a world where

cold and fog lived with you. Here was peace and ease. I had only to close my eyes and forget. Consequently, I did close my eyes and forget.

Albeit, when the sun was withdrawn, they opened again. After all, said I, observing the overcoats and straw hats, the furs and sunshades, this winter warmth of the Côte d'Azur is a prize somewhat precariously held. It smacks of the urchin and his jam jar and one eye on the nursery door; it recalls the modern man of business and his champagne bottle and an ear cocked for the telephone. Jam is good, and champagne is good; but jam and the nurse, champagne and the telephone do not mix.

Then the sun comes forth, the sea laughs at my feet, the orange trees and the flowers and the palms smile, the mountain crags stand immovable, and I hearken to the music.

However, one day, I did ask my concierge. He surprised and delighted me. This man, whom I had regarded as a consulting encyclopedia, or a sort of mechanism into which one dropped questions and there appeared accurate answers, neatly and concisely stated, this man proved to be human and frail and not a machine at all!

"Only the peasants do that, Monsieur."

"Very well, then. I shall be a peasant."

"But, impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and I knew I had him there.

"I shall inquire for Monsieur."

At the end of a week when he brought me nothing definite, and to all my questions gave uncertain replies, I perceived his heart was not in the quest, and that I must put forth efforts of my own.

I sought advice from an American girl.

"Don't be silly," she returned.

I approached some English friends.

"One doesn't do that," they answered.

"Why doesn't one do that?"

"Because one doesn't do that."

I buttonholed a German acquaintance. He heard me in silence, grunted, and puffed a cloud of smoke in my face. When I could see again, he had disappeared.

"I shall seek out my farm myself!" I cried.

III

JEANNETTE

"*VOILÀ, Jeannette, M'sieur!*"

Behold me, then, in bed of a morning, at what hour I must deny you, and Jeannette, guardian of my comforts, poised in the doorway for all the world like an overgrown hen. She is regarding me solicitously. When she sees my eyes open, she places the tall pitcher of water on the floor exactly between two cracks and prepares for a snack of philosophy before going forward with the fire making.

"*Il fait beau,* this morning, M'sieur."

"Truly? Always you say the same, Jeannette."

"But! . . . why not?"

And indeed, why not?

Let that philosophical tidbit taste as it may to you; for myself, I was idle (lazy, if you prefer it) this morning and content to lie in warmth and regard Jeannette. She made haste to draw back the window curtains that I might view the garden and what the weather did.

"But it is cold," I complained.

Jeannette shrugged two shoulders. "Also it is winter." She closed the window with vehemence. "Perhaps it will snow in the hills," she added, in a tone condoling the season's vagaries.

I was perverse, as well as idle (lazy) this morning, so I cried, "That will be jolly! I have never seen it snow!"

She believes everything I tell her. It is a commendable trait I have not observed in everybody. This last, however, somewhat strained her faith.

"How, M'sieur?" she exclaimed.

"I have never seen it snow," I lied.

She was compassion instantly. "The poor fellow, the poor fellow," she mourned for me while I covered my face with bedclothes. She thought I was weeping, for she patted the jerking covers and murmured, "But then, M'sieur has seen it rain, and perhaps hail. Is it not so?"

"Yes, but the snow. Is it that it is black?"

As I peered from beneath the counterpane, she lifted hands frantic with desperate need of simile. "No! No! No! It is white; white, M'sieur, as this," touching the cap of muslin she wears on her hair. "It is white as—as snow!" The hands ineffectual, dropped.

Jeannette comes from Brittany. She has showed me a church,—in a bit of oils, given her by an artist (perhaps she darned his socks!) summering in her corner of France. The Gothic tower mounts confidently into the blue heavens, the sunlight falls strongly on two white, little stone houses below, and the shadows of trees are black and cool. It is better for Jeannette that the churchyard is hidden: better, I say, for therein are the graves of her husband and five children. They went, one by one, and when they were all gone Jeannette of a morning, while the birds piped salutations, took road to seek heart's-ease in the hills of Provence. The spire no doubt still mounts confidently into the blue heavens; for the thoughts of Jeannette I cannot say.

It is not to be imagined that she and I arrived at our pleasant understanding on the moment of meeting. She knew at once I was a barbarian, no countryman of hers. Did I not imperfectly understand her *patois?* And when, on entering my room one day, she discovered me tilted back with my feet on the table, was not that sufficient evidence I was a barbarian with mind disordered? For my part, I objected at first to her shape. It is the shape of an apple, and she is much too large to

be an apple. Furthermore, she wears white woolen stockings and that is something I abhor in man or woman. Piece by piece we removed the wall of distaste. When she learned I craved petting, her motherly instinct routed the aversion for barbarians; and when I detected a leaning toward the practice of philosophy, I forgave her shape. As mutual likes and dislikes in such important matters as the weather and things to eat and the colors of horses and the number of trees in gardens were made known, she decided my mind was on the mend, and, not to be outdone, I closed my eyes to the white woolen stockings. So that now she believes what I tell her: and if she announced to me that the world drew to a close, I would, as a dutiful son, ask her how to prepare myself.

"Jeannette," I say, when she returns with more briquettes of coal and I select the brilliant tie that does most create perturbation in the public gardens, "I have been thinking——"

"Yes, M'sieur?"

"I have been thinking that I will not be brushed this morning."

"Oh, but M'sieur!" She seizes the tool and awaits my submission.

"You brushed me yesterday."

She spreads out her hands.

"I'm too old to be brushed."

She wrinkles her forehead.

"You will be bathing me next."

She taps with her toe.

"I hate being brushed."

She shrugs her shoulders.

The instrument of torture works rapidly.

"Makes you feel like a piece of carpet," I mutter, sulkily.

"One must be *chic,* M'sieur," replies she of the white woolen stockings.

Jeannette, you have a brave and honest heart: that may not bring you much in this world where hearts are somewhat at a discount, but I, for one, am honored in knowing you.

IV

A VISIT

I WAS sitting late one night with book and fire when the door opened and there entered a man. He was bearded, heavy, of countenance fierce and disquieting; in short, formidable. A gun on either shoulder, a hunting knife at his waist, and a revolver on his hip increased my alarm. I seized the poker and leaped against the wall. My visitor, on the contrary, calmly closed the door and advanced to the center of the room. He thrust out his underlip; I trembled.

"And otherwise, you come from America, at least?"

"I do. What then?"

"Behold M. Tartarin."

"Of Tarascon?"

"On the left bank of the Rhone."

"The lion hunter?"

"The scourge of wild beasts."

Into the scuttle went the poker, rattling. I ad-

vanced with two hands outstretched. Alas! First it was necessary for the guns to be deposited. One to a corner they were allotted and we embraced. By good luck I had a large pipe capped with an iron lid, and soon the smoke of Turkish tobacco arose.

Tartarin, at home, hummed the duet from "Robert le Diable."

"It would please me to hear you sing that."

"Some time, some time, at the Bézuquets', when the ladies are present," he replied. "But now to realities."

"Command me."

"About this America. You have scalped your share of the Indians, of course. Would you believe it? The gunsmith, M. Costecalde, advocates a Corsican knife held in the left hand and a Mexican lasso in the right. Impossible! The apothecary, M. Bézuquet, is for poinards—but he is a poltroon who shuts his eyes tight when he fires a gun. For me the Malay krish, and no favors shown. I appeal to you."

"Your method has advantages," was my answer. "It is neater, quicker, handsomer, and gives more scope for the exercise of those qualities we beginners do so admire in you. The Corsican knife,—

that is well enough for Corsicans who know nothing better. Poinards,—pooh! For children. But the krish against the tomahawk! Ah! That is stirring. No doubt at all you are correct. When do you start, M. Tartarin, for the plains of America?"

"Plains of America?" he queried. "Who spoke of plains? I have other work to do. I shall pursue the Apache in the remote fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains and scalp him in his den. As man to man—you have me? Good. My friend, the brave commandant, M. Bravida, former captain of the wardrobe, is firmly with me on this point. The honor of Tarascon! In Shanghai, the Tartars. Bang, bang! Through the windows upon them. In the Sahara, aknee, a gun to hand, hunting knife in the ground before me. Lions! Pfft, pfft! Dead. In the remote fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, man to man and no favors, the Apache! Then on the boundless plains, the buffalo!"

"Ah, the buffalo!"

"How otherwise?"

"The grizzly bear, perhaps?

"After lions? One grizzly bear against Tartarin de Tarascon? You astonish me! It is necessary for the glory of France that I hunt some-

thing in droves. You have killed your thousand head of buffalo—that goes without saying. Are you for the stalk by night or the surprise by day? At the club, at the gunsmith's, on the hunt of a Sunday morning—you should see me returning of a Sunday evening with a rag of a cap!—they all ask for my opinion. And always I speak for the double-barreled rifles and an open stand in the full rush of the herd a million strong. Then let *them* come on!"

He took up the poker and lunged right and left; the weapon circled above his head, it swept across his breast, it made the air to whine. His double muscles played nimbly up and down his arm. He was magnificent! Then Tartarin stepped to the door and knocked it open with a mighty bang. He peered without. "Nothing!" he cried, and locked the door.

"Always nothing," I answered.

"A million strong!" Tartarin shouted, then fixed me with an anxious eye. "Have you warm flannels in America?" he whispered.

"Plenty of flannels."

"And knit waistcoats, and leggins, and caps with ear pieces, and hot chocolate? You may have all these, yes; but you cannot have, no, you cannot

have a little house with white walls and green blinds and a garden. Such a garden! Cactuses, fig-plants, cotton-plants, palm-trees, mango-trees, banana-trees, and a baobab. Such a baobab! None like it. No! You cannot have that. . . . There is no haste about starting."

The book fell from my hand and awoke me to a cold room. "Why, I must have been talking to myself," thought I.

V

THE HUNT IS UP

THE day was Provençal, all sunlight and colors. I concluded it would serve my purpose to find a farm and set forth.

"Carriage, Monsieur?"

There were small bouquets of violets in the bridles of the horses.

"Yes," I answered at once, "a carriage would do very well."

"Where to?" asked the driver, unwinding his brake.

"To a farm."

"Which farm, if you please?"

"Oh, any you think would interest me. Use your judgment."

One thing I admire about the drivers of France: they are never unprepared; and in addition, they always approve of your destination and they never lack confidence in your ability to pay the charge. I once asked a cab driver in New York to take me

to Philadelphia. He was a man of sordid spirit: he inquired how much money I had and when I made display declared he wouldn't take me for twice that amount. There remained nothing for me to do but to reply with some emphasis that I wouldn't go with him if he took me for nothing.

"Ready, Monsieur?" asked Jacques.

"Quite ready."

He cracked his whip, the horses curvetted and leaped forward, and amid sparks from their hoofs, rattling of pole chains, a fusillade of pistol shots from Jacques' whip, we started the hunt. I gave little attention to the course. My driver's back was so square and solid one instinctively had confidence in its owner and felt he knew what he was about. I remember that we mounted between white houses and that presently we were zigzagging across the face of a hill along a road sometimes sliced through smooth rock, sometimes walled with stone, and that the sunshine and shadow lay sharp and defined, that we passed many nooks where bandits should have leaped out upon us, and that the shouts of boys playing hop-scotch in the streets of the town below came up fainter and fainter.

It may have been one hour or two hours before Jacques reined the horses to a halt, and twisting

about on the box, silently pointed with his whip into the valley under the road.

"Not bad, Jacques," I commented. "Not bad at all. But it is down in a hole. I don't know how you feel about it, but for myself I wouldn't like to live in a hole. There is no place to look except up, and that always gives me a crick in my neck. Perhaps yours is constructed differently and isn't affected. It is all my fault; I should have mentioned my neck."

"I should have asked, Monsieur."

This amiability of the men of France! Delicate as the fragrance of flowers, lovely as a flower: a something to stop the breath and to make the eyes grow wet.

"Shall we go on, sir?"

"No, I think I shall leave you here and proceed alone. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing, Monsieur."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Not anything."

"Excuse me. I am stupid."

"Nothing, Monsieur. Jacques says, please your customers. If you don't, there's nothing to pay. Pride of profession, Jacques says."

"But your master?"

"I have no master. Some day we go on the hunt again, yes? I shall think about farms not in a valley, and ask the wife, also. Good-day, Monsieur."

"Good-day, and God bless you."

There was a leaf torn from a hotel guidebook adrift in the roadway. I read:

"Distance: 50 minutes on foot. The path follows the windings of the valley in a magnificent scenery of lemon trees and of olive trees, and arrives at the village of Castellar——"

I looked about. There, sure enough, was the path, rough with cobbles, mounting the hillside. "Very well," thought I, "Castellar it is."

At the first bend I encountered a peasant woman and two children. She gave me a flash of black eyes as I passed and the youngsters tendered a gleam of white teeth. When I glanced back, she was drinking red wine from a bottle. The sunlight, striking through the phial, made iridescent bubbles that floated down her throat while the urchins stood expectantly and sucked their lips. When the woman saw me staring she made a pretty motion of drinking my health. I blew her a kiss and the toddlers

clapped their hands in glee over this amusing conquest Mama had made.

It was not long before the stones led to the road again and so to the top of the hill. A café fronted me and I walked down a sanded path bordered with flowering pansies and into the garden, where a cracked marble-topped table awaited my coming.

"Whatever you have that is appropriate," I told the waiter, and glanced down upon the Mediterranean, gray now and daintily veiled with mist, and then across the valley at the hills flinging themselves into the sky. "And, oh yes, about a farm. Do you know of any? It must not be in a hole, but on a hillside, I think. The view must be good, and the oranges must be ripening, and there must be lavender and rosemary in the breeze. Now that house at the end of the garden; there with the gray-black walls and the red-tiled roof. The windows give to the sea and I'm sure the sunsets are good. That is necessary, though I forgot to mention it. I grow to like this place. Castellar, isn't it?"

"Castellar, sir? That is on the heights yonder."

"Never mind," was my reply, "I have changed my mind. I am not going farming to-day."

VI

INTO THE HILLS

THERE is something finely inspiriting about a salt sea up and at work. The distant rim, torn from its monotonous line of calm, fractured and pitching, holds the eye with zest; the combers marching inshore to be stayed for the minutest second fraction in their culmination ere the tips break and back lash, and the crashing sunshot masses clutch the contained shadows and smash to white fragments—these, too, are cheering. There is also the interval between beach and horizon to observe, an uneasy, crumpled space of green and blue and purple flaunting bits of white as cavalry galloping on rough ground flourish ribbands from their lance points. That is it! The uprisen sea becomes a mounted troop, riding swiftly from afar into the beholder's vision, moving rank after rank, solid and purposeful, to the attack.

The sunshine fitted me like a close garment where

I sat on the promenade, but the spectacle of the charging sea made mock of repose and set me on my way. With the wind and the smell of brine pursuing, I turned up the right bank of the Torrent de Borigo—that winter-withered trickle beside which the women kneel all day to pound and rub soiled linen—and made for the girdle of hills that holds the north wind from Mentone. I call them hills because at the moment they seemed friendly and near, but any Mentonese will tell you they are Maritime Alps. Is not the Grammont four and a half thousand feet high, and the two peaks of the Berceau but little less? Believe me, from the Cime de Restaud you may even see Corsica! On one side the straight road were villas: through the iron gates you saw branching palms and blossoming flowers and green lawn, and wondered what the people who walked in the planned paths thought of all the day. Across the rock-cluttered bed of the vanished flood were terraced slopes and vineyards and little houses clinging to the slant like mushrooms. A desire came to end the search on that hillside. To grow grapes nourished on the sunshine of the south in their tiny walled fields, and to live within the shouting of the sea and the clamor of the street would be pleasant enough; but then

I remembered the houses and that sometimes mushrooms spring close together, and there is no telling when they will rush into growth.

For what does a man desire to go farming if it be not to escape rubbing his elbows threadbare against his fellow-men?

If you continue to follow the right bank of the torrent as I did this third day of February, you will mount in curves above the stream, you will pass innumerable white and pink plastered houses, roses will flash against the walls, dogs will bark, and children will cry at you across the widening valley, the orange and lemon trees will hang their fragrant fruit over your head, men at work in salad gardens will straighten their backs to give you a look, goats will bleat, and a donkey will bray once and abruptly cease, and you will come upon an Alpine troop at ease with stacked guns and knapsacks. The cloaked officers will politely ignore you, but the blue-coated, white-trousered privates will glance you over with a frank, appraising eye.

The way now crosses the water on a stone bridge of three tall, graceful arches, and begins to coil up the opposite side of the basin through the gray-

leafed olive trees. You do not know where you are going and you do not care. The game is follow the leader, and the road runs ahead. The wind, diverted through the higher gullies, greets you on the open spurs; a step in retreat and you may stand out of the blast and see the whole slanting forest roof harassed. The peaks across the valley rise more and more independently, the connecting line yaws so whimsically against the sky it seems, if you happen to have trifled with engineering, to be the profile map of some preposterous railway. And now the road underfoot, which has been offering a complete course in the construction of mountain thoroughfares, graduates you with a final demonstration in excavations to a path that, like so many paths, leads to nothing at all. You wander in high and solitary places around the bare shoulders of your Maritime Alp; you watch dead leaves sink gently through hyaline voids; you listen to stones racketing down worn water grooves; the leaning pines send up their evening anthem to you, the free wind is in your bosom, and your eye masters long miles of unobstructed distance. Night finds you in your aërial loft occupied with thoughts and witless of latitude. Before you begin the adventure of returning you swing your feet over

the black gorge and repose to smoke. As the spark glows red, you remember something about a quest, and you smile to yourself with mere joy of being where you are.

VII

INTO ITALY

ANTOINE FONTAINE is slender and young, with murky eyes and black hair, and the wistfulness of good breeding. He has a trick of pausing in his play to turn his head aside, curtain his gaze, and to consider with himself the odd and interesting points of this world. Sometimes we gravely, and as men of discrimination and experience, discuss the *pâtés* of Paris. For several days he had been more than usually detached from his surroundings, he had lived within himself; it seemed proper when he came this morning and stood by my chair, silent, that I should ask after a while, "Antoine, what is it you seek?"

He scooped some pebbles from the path and filtered them through his fingers, all the time head acock. Then of a sudden, taking the chance with never a quiver—like the true sportsman he is—he gave me answer.

"The curleque cakes, Monsieur."

"The *whirligig* cakes?"

Instantly he spun around to thrill me with pain and pleasure as I looked for a moment into his eyes, from which all the shadow and reserve were gone. In their depths I saw many things that had once been mine.

"Curleque!" he insisted, to hide his emotion.

"Whirligig!" I retorted, to conceal my own.

"Antoine! Antoine!" his mother called, under her breath. "You must not beset the gentleman."

"Madame," I pleaded, approaching her chair, "Antoine and I go to search for the curleque-whirligig cakes. Is it permitted?"

She did not pretend to understand the quest, or Antoine, or myself. She smiled a little sadly, and replied, "You are an American, and so you can take care of yourself. Will you also take care of my boy? He is only nine."

I bowed, Antoine kissed her, and he and I set forth.

"Antoine," I remarked, "your mother said for you to take care of me. Therefore I want you to see that you do it."

Before us opened the Avenue Boyer and the Avenue Félix Faure. "Heads, right; tails, left," said I, and tossed a sou. "Heads! Leave the coin

lie, to please me. It will make a rich man, if he finds it, poorer, and a poor man richer. That is as it should be."

Solicitously we went down the street of the sycamore trees. Every shop window passed under our scrutiny. Into each *pâtisserie* we entered, and while Antoine inspected the parade of cakes, I inquired of the cashier, "Madame, what is it that is round like a muffin, but white and smooth on top save for little twisted bits of coffee cream; and all dusted over with golden grains of something or other, so when you bite into it you forget everything else, including home and country?"

Always she shook her head, and when I glanced at Antoine, he shook his, so I also shook mine, and then we went out the door. Thus we came to the lower end of the town where the streets are narrow, and the shadows foreboding, and the houses almost knock their foreheads together, and the canary birds sing all day long to the passersby. One shop remained; we entered it solemn but undismayed, as men going into battle. I had engaged the cashier, when a cry from Antoine halted me.

"There!" he exclaimed, pointing into the center of the display.

There, indeed, was a curleque-whirligig cake.

Only one; but a genuine, really-truly curleque-whirligig. The waitress advanced with plate and fork, and my companion and I, falling in behind, triumphantly followed her to the table.

"Antoine," I said, "yours by right of discovery. Besides, I must have some tobacco this second."

When I returned the plate was bare, and my comrade beat a thoughtful tattoo on the marble.

"I have been thinking, Monsieur Jean," he began, as we walked down to the breakwater, "it may be you are looking for something and I can help you find it."

Now came my turn to stake everything. I breathed deep, gripped my nerves, and replied, "I am looking for a farm."

Antoine jumped. "A farm with rabbits on it?"

"Exactly."

"Monsieur Jean! Let us not stand here. Rather let us hunt the farm!"

"Yes, but where?"

He peered across the bay to the Italian headlands pushed out into the sea.

"Have you tried Italy?"

"Forward!"

We marched in soberness, though we desired to skip. Where the perfect road turns to run beneath

the leaning trees to the water as though it planned to leap and have done with automobiles and carriages and promenaders, we found a green bench in the sunshine against the stone wall and out of the cooling wind, and sat down to consider details. A square-rigged two-master under full canvas was standing forth to the open sea. She drew steadily away on the port tack; all sails packed tight, she heeled to the waves and reeled a line of white from her forefoot. To me she was a smuggling pirate ship, and perhaps the same to Antoine, for he asked abruptly:

"Would you like to have an adventure?"

"Would I? That's what I live for."

"So I thought. Well, then, what do you say to playing smugglers and smuggling something into Italy?"

"Good! What shall we smuggle, Captain?"

Antoine considered. "It must be something worth while, and useful on the farm. I know. Stones! You can throw them at the beasts that come in the dark to devour the rabbits."

"The very thing."

We leaped off the wall upon the beach and searched for stones round and sleek and suitable for throwing at wild beasts that come in the night

to devour rabbits. When our pockets were swollen large, we clambered back to the road and proceeded cautiously, yet boldly, toward Italy. People observed us curiously, our necks itched, but we strode with indifferent, innocent mien, whistling, as smugglers do.

And now we approached the frontier. We crossed the Alpine stream between the French and Italian guardhouses, we were almost safe, when a soldier blocked our way. He was all uniform and gold lace and bristling mustache, and he was about to condemn us to death when I beheld Antoine to wheel and to bolt for his life back into France. Being thus abandoned I, too, turned tail and desperately fled. The stones, round and sleek and suitable, jounced from our pockets and rattled on the hard roadway.

VIII

MONSIEUR DORLODOT

I WAS awakened this morning by rumbling drums and sounding bugles. Rub-a-dub-dub, rat-a-tat-tat! The troops of Provence were passing in quick step! Below my window the road was alive with glancing bayonets, soldiers in blue tunics, soldiers trousered in red, officers with drawn swords, horses desiring to caper, and in the rear a mountain company in heavy marching order, alpenstocks in knapsacks topped with canteens, and last of all the knocked down artillery and the ammunition cases mounted on four outwardly decorous mules desiring nothing at all save mangers filled with feed and first an opportunity to roll.

How the flushed Provençals did admire the brave sight! They told me it was a fête day to commemorate the union of Mentone with France, and hearing this, I wondered what the people would do to spend the unaccustomed hours of freedom. I know the exigencies of a States holiday in town, and I have seen an English crowd endeavoring

celebration, and the unflustered Germans at play. Now for the Latins, thought I.

There was music this afternoon in the public gardens. The Mentonese stood close in the strength of the sun; sailors, clerks, merchants, peasants, fishermen, women of all fashions, youngsters from the quay and streets and hotels; all were there, and all listened silently to uncommon music creditably given. Promenading was not encouraged: there was no jostling, no exchange of wit, no flirtatious comments. Three boys clustered on the steps of the musicians' stand sighted in the sky three toy balloons tied together and making rapidly toward the Alps. They started to exclaim over this marvel, but the upraised hand of an elderly gentleman reduced them to pantomime and dumb craning of necks.

Some one plucked my sleeve. I turned to find Jacques in a state of excitement. He laid a finger to his lips and drew me aside where we might talk without disturbing others.

"Monsieur still seeks a farm?"

"Assuredly."

"Then all is well. I have but now seen M. Dorlodot, first cousin to my wife, grower of lemons in the Gorbio Valley, and he knows everything!"

"Let us find this astonishing man."

We discovered M. Dorlodot wedged in an armchair—for this luxury, Jacques whispered me, he must pay rent to the amount of twenty centimes the afternoon, so you saw for yourself that lemon growing was profitable.—The renter of the armchair acknowledged my presentation and warily raised his hat, but not so warily I failed to glimpse the bald spot atop his pate. Confidence in M. Dorlodot collapsed therewith. It is my experience that a man ashamed of honest baldness is a man to be watched.

"A proud day for Mentone," said M. Dorlodot.

"And for France," I added. It was a mistake. By the way he twisted his mustache, I beheld land values advance stupendously.

He spoke again:

"There will be fireworks this evening."

"The kind that climb into the night like blazing bullets and explode purple and gold stars that end in big bangs?"

"How do I know? Fireworks are a waste of money."

"Yes, perhaps it were best spent for bonbons. They last longer."

"Now about farms——" began M. Dorlodot,

when the leader rapped with his baton and we fell silent. My own thoughts were far from agriculture when the music ceased. I was wondering, if I should leap with a parachute from the top of the highest limestone crag behind the gardens, how long it would take me to reach solid ground, and I was debating with myself the merits of starting head first or feet first when M. Dorlodot said:

"You understand that the lemon crop will be marvelous this year, so rentals and the price——"

"Of lemonade will be much lower. That is jolly for those who drink the beverage. I don't, myself. It's never sweet enough, or never sour enough. Which is it?"

"Of lands will be higher," he continued, coldly. "If, indeed, you can get any one at all to sell."

My eyes were again attracted to the heights. Certainly, the better plan were to start feet first: one could enjoy the scenery to more advantage, and if one became tired of the method, or the view grew montonous, one could up-end and travel the other way, and while the time with speculating where to land.

"But not unreasonably high," went on M. Dorlodot.

"And the price of the sunshine, and the song

of birds, and the tales the wind tells,—do they remain the same?"

Again the leader rapped with his stick, and we gave our attention to the music. At least I suppose the other two did: I had set sail on the Mediterranean, and with lee rail awash was beating down the long slant to Africa to hear the songs of the boatmen on the Nile, when the voice of M. Dorlodot recalled me.

"I do not trade in sunshine and bird songs and the tales of the wind. I grow lemons."

"Al-lah! Al-lah!——" came across the river under the stars, but I resolutely closed my ears to the boatmen.

"Yes, yes," I answered the grower of lemons. "And you were saying something about a farm. Is it down in a valley?"

"No, it is on a hillside."

"Excellent! And from one window do you have sight of the road mounting up from the sea?"

"How do I know? I never looked."

Jacques touched my elbow. "Enough," he whispered. "Lest I forget he is first cousin to my wife. Leave me to deal, Monsieur, with this man who does not understand the amenities of life."

IX

A REPRIMAND

M. LELEU is proprietor of some sort of a shop in the Rue Partouneaux. On the pavement is one of these rotating stands stacked with picture post-cards. What is within the shop I do not know and have no desire to learn. M. Leleu is squat and bewhiskered, with mustaches that curl like ram's horns. He is thoroughly despicable.

One day I sauntered through the streets of Mentone with mind engaged on the psychology of hats. I wore a derby headgear. As effect follows cause, it bent my desires to appear normal, modish, and unimpeachable, to scatter about the impression that somewhere were large interests running under their own momentum and giving me leisure to loiter along sidewalks. How differently, I mused, would I feel under a soldier's helmet. Then my neck would stiffen, my legs would go with quick-reaching steps, a gun would snuggle to my shoulder, there

would be no streets and houses, but the dust assailing my nostrils and a long road through the pines rocking under the troop's march. Or suppose I wore a riding cap. Then would I feel a horse stir to his stride, his mouth against the bits, the wind and hoof strokes in my ears, and the rolling hills calling us forward. Or a fishing hat. That would bring the dark pools and white water of a trout stream, and all the music of the forest, and the lithe pole and the flirt of the thin line and the flutter of the flies; then the strike and flash and struggle.

My eye saw a woman's hat across the way and I wondered on what her mind was set. Before I could decide I beheld a fleck of blue through the greenery of the gardens, and a moment later came the poetic inspiration. I stopped on the spot.

"The sea is blue, so blue,
My thoughts——"

proposed the inspiration, and I was groping for my pencil when this M. Leleu, of whom you have heard, addressed me from his doorway.

"Post-cards, Monsieur?"

I tried the suggestion.

"My thoughts are all of post-cards."

Something was awry. "No," I cried, "that doesn't rhyme, and it breaks the meter, and it is not truthful. Ah! Now I see what you mean, and I say again, No! A thousand times a thousand times, no! You have ruined a poem."

M. Leleu shrugged his shoulders.

As for me, I gritted my teeth and continued down the Rue Partouneaux. What right had this man to build a shop where it was my desire to build a poem? His audacity must be punished, and I determined to seek out Jacques for advice.

That evening when dark was routing the twilight, I again passed the shop of M. Leleu. As Jacques had prophesied, the iron shutter of the door was drawn halfway down. It was no trick at all to push it clanging to the pavement and then to dodge into the Rue Ardoino and run for the promenade by the sea.

M. Leleu, I am told, raised up the shutter and came forth from his burrow. It so happened that Antoine Fontaine approached.

"The miscreant who would make sport of me," exclaimed the former. "Which way did he go?"

"Into the Rue Ardoino," replied the latter.

"Quick, Monsieur Pepeu, we shall apprehend him."

"Leleu, boy, Leleu."

He commended the care of his shop to the clerk, and with Antoine Fontaine started the chase. At the end of the street, I am given to understand, they encountered Jacques standing on his box and pointing with his whip.

"There went the villain. Into the carriage, Monsieur Gegeu! We shall catch him yet."

"Leleu, man, Leleu."

And now from behind me on the empty drive the pursuit drew up hand over hand. When the galloping horses came abreast, I backed against the wall and smiled to myself.

"Rascal!" bellowed Jacques, seizing me by the right arm.

"Ruffian!" squealed M. Leleu, clutching the left arm.

"Wretch!" chirped Antoine, shaking a fist in my face.

"Gentlemen," I pleaded, "I am an innocent farmer. It is a harmless mania of mine to close all shutters after nightfall. I beg you set me free."

"To the guardhouse," clamored M. Leleu, shoving me forward. "Ah, my farmer friend, it will

go hard with you, very hard indeed. Caught red-handed! This is a good night's work. How the Captain will applaud my deed! What else have you to say for yourself?"

"Only this, fair sir. I would like my picture on a post-card. Did you bring your camera?"

"Yes," echoed Antoine and Jacques, "did you bring your camera?"

"My camera?" repeated M. Leleu. "No."

We turned upon him.

"Dolt!" roared Jacques.

"Loon!" I shouted.

"Donkey!" piped Antoine.

We three entered the carriage and left M. Leleu alone with the Mediterranean Sea.

"I do not understand," we heard him say.

X

A PINCH OF SALT

"MONSIEUR still desires a farm?" asked Jacques.

"Fervently," I replied.

"Very well! This morning I came upon François Rhoumare, grower of flowers near Grasse, and betrothed to the sister of my wife. We spoke together, in confidence, aside, and he told of a farm near his own, carefully tilled and well placed. Not for open sale, this farm, but François—betrothed to the sister of my wife—has mentioned that the proper approaches can be made. You understand, Monsieur?"

I nodded and murmured, "Bravo, François!"

"He sits at the Café Grignon. He has the honor to invite you to eat with us. Will you come, Monsieur?"

"Instantly," I answered, and closed my book. "Not an hour gone the thought was mine how I would enjoy lunching out to-day. One has these premonitions, you know."

"It is true, indeed: one has."

He led the way down the garden path, and I followed, whispering to myself, "The Café Grignon!" And then, "Carefully tilled and well placed!"

As I stepped into Jacques' carriage, two urchins loitering beside the iron gates of the wall nudged each other. "Monsieur who desires a farm," we heard.

"What then?" Jacques demanded, and they made off with rapidity. "Chatterboxes!" he growled, taking the reins.

"The Café Grignon!" I mused. And then, "Carefully tilled and well placed!"

As we drove through the public gardens, a pedestrian motioned for us to halt. "Monsieur who desires a farm?" he asked, approaching.

"Monsieur who desires his lunch," I returned, and Jacques urged on the horses.

The Café Grignon! Who has not heard of it? He that has not lunched there has never lunched at all. I desired to carol as I recollected the cool, dim interior, the square, heavy tables, the soft-stepping servitors, and the dishes uncovered under your eyes. Alas! As we stopped before the entrance, an intruder, with the face of an agent, stole to my

side. "Monsieur who desires a farm?" he babbled.

I pretended to be deaf and dumb, and hurried within. "Jacques," I stammered, when we were safe, "I must find a farm immediately. I am becoming notorious." My voice, I fear, betrayed my emotion.

"Courage," he made answer. "We have not seen François."

"Carefully tilled," I repeated. "And well placed."

M. François Rhoumare was discovered at table, deep in the columns of *Le Cri*. A gloomy, cadaverous sort of being he, whose aspect, it privately struck me, must wilt all the flowers his farm grew.

"The brotherhood of man shall never obtain until each receives the just product of his labor," he tacked to our greeting. Jacques and I looked at one another, perplexed. M. Rhoumare resumed reading. "Order what you please," he tossed out. "Everything is the same to me."

"A fish?" I ventured. For somehow, gazing upon our host, that creature came to mind.

"A salad?" Jacques added.

"Each consumer shall be a producer," muttered M. Rhoumare, turning a page. "That is fundamental; that is to say, at the base. Yes, a salad."

We awaited further revelations from behind the newspaper. I was ill at ease, but at sight of the lettuce so pretty and green, nesting so sweetly in its large bowl, I took heart again.

"Jacques," said I, "you must mix us one of your famous dressings."

My friend smiled with pleasure. He is a true artist with the salad spoon, and like all artists, has a relish for appreciation.

"Oil and vinegar, pepper and salt and garlic," he commanded.

They came: such unctuous oil, such clear vinegar, such powdery pepper, such snowy salt, such a doughty, aromatic, little garlic. At once Jacques was much occupied, rubbing, measuring, mixing, testing, frowning, stirring, smiling. His hands flew about like birds. I looked on with the admiration accorded genius. M. Rhoumare read *Le Cri.*

"There!" cried Jacques, at last, when all these manipulations were finished. He served the lettuce on individual plates; he stationed the dressing in the center of the table and gave it a loving glance. "It is my masterpiece," said he, simply.

I wetted my lips.

M. Rhoumare flung aside the paper and accepted

his plate. He poured upon the lettuce some of the dressing, and then without remark, without even a taste, he sprinkled thereon a pinch of salt, a gross pinch of salt.

I shivered: Jacques went pale: M. Rhoumare crunched. And still no remark. Finally, Jacques arose and walked straight for the doorway. I followed: I entered the carriage, and we two drove for miles in silence.

XI

FOUND AND LOST

I HAVE found and lost my farm! Such a pretty little farm, all of three acres, and the price so reasonable. But when I went to the bank and asked after my account, the man told me sadly it had sunk very low. I suppose he knows: he said he kept track, and I have seen him write down on papers the amount of the money that at different times he has pushed out to me under the wicket. I went away and looked at the sea and returned again to make sure. The sum he mentioned was the same as before. Clearly, the farm was beyond my reach. To have spent all one's money for a farm in looking for a farm! Unspeakable!

Jeannette of the white woolen stockings and shape of an apple found me, disconsolate, in the garden.

"What goes wrong, M'sieur?" she asked.

"The farm," I replied. "It is no longer possible."

"But why?"

"I have spent too much money. There is not enough left."

She clasped her hands and shook her head.

"That is sad, M'sieur, that is very sad. Still, what matter? It is not always in having that the blessing dwells; it is often in desiring. The sunshine of this coast, M'sieur, is brilliant and warm, and the blue of the sea cannot be forgotten, but the hills are hard and the mistral blows and there are taxes and mortgages and lawsuits, and the walls of rock must be kept standing to hold up the fields. I know, for I have lived on these farms. Yes, I, Jeannette. The rains come sometimes in plenty and sometimes they do not: and then one puts faith in the dews; but dews are not rain, so sometimes the ditches that water the gardens are dry. The groves of twisted olive trees are fine to look upon as a cloth of silver, and the black fruit that the women and children gather and the laden sacks going to the oil mill are good to see, but there is the white worm that eats, and sometimes the sacks are not filled. M'sieur admires the slopes crossed with stone walls and lined with vinestocks. It is pleasant, also, in the month of October to make merry with the vintagers over a bounteous harvest. Then one forgets the labor of pruning and the fear of

frosts after the blossoms come and the hailstorms of summer that riddle the vines and break down the weak wall. A poet might write of the green sprays of the lemon and orange trees and their white blossoms and their yellow and red jewels, but what does a poet know of manuring and the cold nights when fires are lighted and anxious men never know sleep? I come from Brittany, as you know, M'sieur, and I like not these Provençals. They will not learn, they do not care, they are hot of temper, and given to noisy talk, they are stingy and their fingers burn. You might have paid more than the farm was worth. I have finished, M'sieur. Cannot we be happy in our garden, you and I?"

"And I, too!" cried Antoine Fontaine, who came down the path. "We can all be happy. What is it that grieves you both?"

"Antoine," was my reply, "my farm is lost to me."

"That is a wound that hurts. I know: I have lost things. But, tell me, did this farm have rabbits on it?"

"The owner said nothing about them."

"Then he was deceiving you. It is so on the face of it. Had there been rabbits, he would not have kept silent. Monsieur does not want a farm with no rabbits. What would he do to amuse

himself all day long? Here we can be happy together. Have I not the right of it, Jeannette?"

She nodded her head many times.

"You have, M'sieur Antoine. He is very fortunate, I think. Who knows? They might have trapped him in a lawsuit. What a calamity! Do I want to see these Provençals smile and point the finger behind his back? And, as you say, what is a farm without rabbits? And, also, without flowers? Were there pinks and hepaticas and violets and anemones and roses on this farm, M'sieur Jean?"

"I didn't ask."

"There now, you see how it is. You didn't ask, and the owner didn't say!"

"But what of Jacques?" I returned. "He had such interest. It will be a blow to him."

"He comes to take you on the hunt," Antoine answered. "I met him but now on the promenade, and so he said."

A carriage stopped before the gate, and Jacques' step sounded in the gravel. I advanced to greet him.

"My friend," I said, "no longer do we go on the hunt together. The farm is found and lost. I have not enough money to buy it."

He removed his hat, and ran a handkerchief carefully across his forehead before he spoke.

"Again, Monsieur, if you please."

"The man in the bank said there wasn't money enough for me to buy a farm."

"That is painful," replied Jacques, slowly. "That is painful. Attend! In the wife's stocking at home is gold and silver and copper——"

"No!" I cried. "No! Some day you will buy the wife a new dress."

"Yes, it is in my thoughts. Ah, well! Monsieur has the garden and his books and his pen. Is it not so?"

"He might have paid more than the farm was worth," added Jeannette.

"It had no rabbits on it," continued Antoine. "No rabbits and no flowers for them to smell. Such a place is not a farm."

"And I shall come of an afternoon on my way home, and we shall talk together," said Jacques. "And some time the wife will come in her new dress. We can all be happy together here. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I replied, "we shall be happy here in the garden."

XII

THE SOCIETY

WE four have formed a society. At first I favored the name, "Society for Esthetic Agriculture"; but when Jeannette raised her hands, Jacques scratched his head, and Antoine protested he did not know the meaning of esthetic: above all, when it developed I had foggy ideas myself, the company unanimously decided on "Society For Farming As It Should Be."

Officers were then elected. Antoine, president; Jacques, vice-president; Jeannette, treasurer; myself, secretary.

Antoine assumed the chair. "Lady and gentlemen," he announced, "we have met this day, as you know. We shall now hear from Madame, the Honored Treasurer."

Jeannette arose and courtesied. "Gentlemen," she began, "I have never made many speeches, so if I don't accomplish a good one you will know why that is. I have thought that on a farm there

should be many flowers, indeed, very many flowers of all kinds and colors. You should see them wherever you look: from the windows of the house, from the road, from the paths on the hills. Their fragrance should come to you when you work indoors or in the fields; it should be with you at your labor, at your play, and in your dreams. These flowers will never be thirsty or weary. The good God will send the rains in plenty and will temper the sun. They will live in happiness and sweet content, holding up their faces to heaven, and when they come to die, they will do so gladly, for they are certain they are going where they shall never know winter."

"We shall now hear from Monsieur, the Honored Vice-President," said Antoine.

"Lady and gentlemen," Jacques commenced, "when I was a boy I once went to a city where they make toys. I was ragged and had no money, but the streets were free, and so I walked about, looking in the windows at the toys. I thought then, and I think now, that the right kind of a farm would be a toy farm, where the toys grow on trees and all you have to do is shake the limbs and the toys fall down into your hands. There should be many drum trees, for there can never

be too many drums, and on the top of the tallest tree would be a drum large as a cask. And you would shake the tree and the drum wouldn't come down, and you would shake and shake, and it wouldn't come down. So finally, you would have to climb up the tree, holding your breath all the while, and pluck the drum and bear it down with gentleness. The sticks would be thrust through the strings, and you would sit on a stone wall and all the afternoon make the echoes come back across the valley. That would suit me."

"We shall now hear from Monsieur, the Honored Secretary," said Antoine.

"Lady and gentlemen," was my beginning, "in the first place, it seems to me, there should be horses on the farm. A knockabout horse: he is bay in color, around fifteen hands, clever and quick, confident in you and in himself, whimsical and prankish on the start, steady when homing so that you may loosen the reins and dream while he picks the road in the dusk. His name is 'Billy.' Then there is a hunter: rangy and well-limbed, noble-hearted and fearless, game to death; he is black, with a mane that the wind blows across his neck; he answers to 'Coming,' and he adores sugar. Next, a roadster: a veteran that senses the best

traveling and the moods of the day; he is certain and reliable and untiring, and you love him. His color, too, is bay, or perhaps a chestnut, and his name is 'Corporal.' Then there are the work horses; Normans for the most part, great, kindly, gray fellows that know what they are about and how to heave into the collars; and a few Belgians that never flinch or shirk.

"Secondly, dogs. You can never have too many dogs, provided they are gentlemen born. Bulldogs, Airedales, water spaniels, Irish terriers, setters. One of the dogs must be named 'Minco,' because —well, because. And there should always be a litter or two of pups to frolic with.

"Thirdly, the farm itself. It should be a mixture of pine and beech woods, mountains, streams, the sea, and a bit of prairie. There are hungry trout in the streams, and deer in the woods, and bears in the mountains, and grouse on the prairie, and pirates on the sea. There is a high wall running all around, but nobody ever bumps against it or knows that it is there except the people you don't like who try to get in, and they are stood up against the wall and shot.

"Fourthly, the house. It should have a red roof and many windows, and fine turf growing up to

the vines, and a few music-making trees near. The living-room is of most importance: it is very large and there are guns and tackle and solid chairs and rugs, and a fireplace always burning wood; instruments of music are in the corner, and everywhere are the books you have read over and over, and wherever you sit or stand you can reach out and find ice for your glass and matches for your pipe. No matter what hour of day or night you come into this house there will always be at least three of the men and women and children you like best in the world before the fireplace or around a table or playing at games by the window. Everybody goes to bed when he desires, and gets up when he wishes: meals are whenever you happen to think. It is the House of Each Do As He Please. There is only one rule. Nobody is permitted to bring a watch or a clock or a calendar into this house. Nobody knows what time or what day it is, and nobody cares.

"That is all I can think of."

"We shall now hear from myself, the Honored President," Antoine stated. "Lady and gentlemen, I haven't much to say, and that is mostly all about rabbits. On a farm there should be many rabbits of all colors, white, black, yellow, blue—if there

are any blue rabbits. And they should be all sizes, from those who can hop a little to those who can hop over the hedge. Each one knows his name, and when you call it out, he comes running and sits on his hind legs and wriggles his nose while you feed him lettuce. They are all good rabbits; if they get bad they are put in prison and have to stay there and eat old turnip parings until they repent and say they will be good. They never hide in holes or in the walls or in the canebrakes, but stay where you can see them. They are always happy because they have lots to eat and plenty of cool water to drink, and they never die. They can run very fast when they want to, but they never want to when you try to catch them. They squat down and pretend they can't see you, and when you pick them up, they never kick or scratch; they stay still, and if you put them on your shoulder they won't jump off. Once I had a white rabbit named 'Bulbu.' He was old and cross, and he kicked like everything. So I traded him for two young white rabbits with a boy who said he didn't mind an old mean rabbit. And I put the two young ones in a box in the garden of our house in Paris and they were very happy, and so was I, until they died. Some of these rabbits on the farm can thump

with their hind legs so it sounds like a hammer, and some of them can't, because they are just beginning to learn, so they go off by themselves and practise. Sometimes they fight, but most of the time they play games or sit in the shade or hop around and eat. Some are very wise, and some just pretend. When you whistle, they all sit up and look. Some have pink eyes and some have black. That's all."

Every one of these suggestions for farming as it should be was thereupon carried without a dissenting vote.

XIII

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

ALL the sunlight of the world seemed poured into my window; the sea beyond the garden wall sang; a breeze hid behind the curtains: when I remembered the chill and fog in Paris, I smiled to myself with the content of a dry cat, and sipped my chocolate lingeringly.

A tapping came at the door: tap—tap—tap, emphatic, but not boisterous. As though the owner of those fingers brought news that warranted their early summons. I set down my cup, calling, "Enter!"

Antoine Fontaine admitted himself. Not the Antoine of eleven o'clock in the public gardens, cool, imperturbable, listening to the music with critic's head acock—not he at all. Here was an Antoine with eyes lighted, cheeks flushed, and black hair somewhat disordered.

"Monsieur Jean!"

"Monsieur Antoine!"

He twittered with excitement. He, a Parisian! News, indeed, he must bring. I also began to twitter.

"You will forgive my intruding before Monsieur has arisen? It is so important, and perhaps it will not wait for us. It came last night. A yacht in the harbor! Truly. Large, oh, large as the boats between Dover and Calais,—no, larger, much larger —and white, white, with yellow stack, and brass railings that shine, oh, how they shine! Quick, I beg of you!"

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, leaping out of bed. "And I lie here like a great-grandfather. One moment, and we are off."

"Which tie, Monsieur?" asked Antoine, running to the dresser.

"The red; no, the blue,—that is my yachting tie. Now my white shoes. Where did Jeannette put them? Under the wardrobe. And my flannel trousers? I suppose she hung them up. She's always doing things like that."

Hurrying and scurrying, doors slammed, buttons flying, chairs overturned, water spilled, collars on the floor, and we make for the quay. Luck is with us, and we find our vessel still anchored within the breakwater and snubbing the fishing boats

with patched, red sails that presume to approach. The sun flashes and reflects from her as from a jewel: the whole harbor is her setting. We are in the nick of time, for smoke is wreathing from her yellow stack.

"A beauty, Antoine."

"My faith, yes."

A dinghy drops from the davits and comes bumping across the little waves of the basin that are always talking about their big brothers at sea. We watch, fascinated.

"I wish——" begins my companion, when he is interrupted.

"The Elixir of Provence," whines a beggar, shuffling beside us, and thrusting into my hand a phial of rose-tinted liquid that glows like a coal. "The Elixir of Provence, Messieurs. I say no more. One whiff—zi-i-i-t!"

Impelled by I know not what impulse, I give the beggar a coin, draw the stopple, and hold the phial to my nostrils. A perfume pungent, indissoluble, heavy, fills my head and permeates my veins. One-half the elixir has gone, and I hand the remainder to Antoine Fontaine, saying, "Make haste, the dinghy is waiting."

On board *La Fée,* everything is ordered commotion, sailors coming and going with a purpose, officers directing. The Captain, hand to cap, receives us as we touch the deck.

"We are ready to sail when it pleases you, Messieurs."

"When you are ready," we reply, and walk aft to sit in the wicker chairs under the awning.

Presently the anchor chains are drawn up, rattling; there is a vibration in the body of the ship, a churning at the stern, and we move in a long sweep around the breakwater, and point down the coast. The vibration smoothes to a purl, the wake streams out bubbling and foaming, and the shore runs by on the gallop. The Mediterranean has donned her prettiest dress for us; it is blue, a dark, vivid, tingling blue that almost makes one cry out. Monte Carlo appears and vanishes, Nice and Cannes,—we shall soon sight Marseilles. The sunshine is everywhere, running along the brass railings, glancing on the white paint, gilding the plume of smoke, lapping at our feet, filling our hands, touching our faces. The air is keen but warm, with a rare fragrance; it is like breathing the bouquet of a Southern wine. When I close my eyes, there

is another aroma, faint and clinging, a reminiscence of that strange Elixir of Provence. Ah, Marseilles is passed, and yonder a moment ago was Gibraltar. Now there is no land on any quarter, only the blue, flat water, and the blue, curving sky. Where are we going?

The Captain comes and addresses us. "We approach the enchanted island where lies your treasure. Messieurs, have you any further wishes?"

"I wish——" begins Antoine.

"Your pardon," says the Captain. "Look, to starboard."

She is a black craft we overhaul, tall-masted, low-lying, flying the skull and crossbones, cleaving the water like the fin of a shark. As we draw alongside, her crew with red sashes about their middles, brass rings in their ears, arms tattooed, knives between their teeth, faces stained with powder, swarm to the gunnel and invite us under the *Jolly Roger.* One rascal in the crow'snest removes his pipe and wriggles his bare toes in the air most fraternally, and another, who is hanging the wash on the galley, drops his clothespins and roguishly throws us a kiss. Antoine dances and waves his hand as long as the pirates can be seen.

"I wish——"

"Your pardon," the Captain interrupts me. "Again look to starboard."

This time we approach a full-waisted sloop that clings wickedly close to the wind. She carries no flag and no name; there is nothing about her to attract attention save the whistling helmsman who tips us a wink and twists a thumb at the cargo covered with tarpaulins. His two mates playing checkers in the shade of the sail, continue absorbed in the game, and do not raise their heads. Smugglers, of course.

"Is there anything more you desire, Messieurs?" asks the Captain, when the sloop is lost to view.

Antoine and I gaze at each other. We have seen pirates and smugglers all in one day. What more can we desire?

"Land-ho!" calls our lookout, and we walk forward as the yacht enters port. The anchor splashes, the dinghy is lowered, we two take our places in the stern sheets, the sailors dip their oars. "Adieu, Messieurs!" cries the Captain. "Follow the road from the landing."

What do we find? Guess. . . . You cannot? . . . The farm!

Such is the tale of the morning as I am pleased to write it. What really happened was that Antoine and I, hand in hand, stood on the quay, a little sad, a little envious, and watched that jewel of a yacht pick up her anchor and steam away into the blue until smoke and yellow funnel and sea melted together, and the horizon was a straight line.

XIV

WHY NOT?

"WHAT are you reading, Monsieur Jean?" asked Antoine Fontaine.

"A book about this Riviera of yours; called 'The Maritime Alps.'"

"What does it say?"

"It says," I replied, taking up the volume and beginning to read, "'Lying on the high road to Italy the district which we call Provence was trodden by every foot. It was the path alike of the foreign invader and of the conquering soldier who had dared to cross his Rubicon. Along the shore of Maritime Provence, and later across the passages of her Alps, poured Celts and Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Vandals, Huns, and Berbers. And the tribes who came to Provence seldom left it. Every wanderer or marauder found here what he most sought, or what he most regretted. The Greeks, if they had to import the olives of Pallas, found here fair skies, pale marbles, violets fit for Hylas,

and roses of which Alcibiades might have made his wreath: to say nothing of a sea as "deeply, darkly, beautifully blue" as that which breaks round the Leucadian headland. The Jews, who drifted hither, first after the persecution of Titus, and again in 1492, after their expulsion from Spain, found here the corn and wine and oil of promise, with terraces, not unlike those of Judea, surrounding "cities that had foundations" in the sunny hills. The Moors were soon at home in the dusty, *Wady*-like ravines: the crags, the sunshine, and the palms of Provence leaving them but little to regret. For the Phœnician traders there were safe harbors; for the Aragonese a dialect not unlike their own (*Catalan*); Florentines, red-handed from the strife of Guelf and Ghibelline in the Lily City, made themselves new counting-houses in Provence; while the Lombard and Genoese traders found in the Rhone valley a highway for their commerce. These influences procured for the district of the Maritime Alps a rich and a varied past, and in the same manner the exceptional climate and the unique position of the country now insure for it a future of affluence.'"

"There are many long words I do not know in that," Antoine meditated. "The Romans called

this the 'Bay of Peace,' and it may be Cæsar came here with his legions."

"It is well-named the Bay of Peace," was my answer. "If I had been Cæsar, perhaps Rome would never have seen my return from Gaul. It is so easy to forget here. The Mentonese are blessed folk: they do not desire much; they have their music and laughter and love of country. If they wish, they can go yonder to Cap Martin and see the stones of the abbey that the Saracens pulled down in the night centuries ago, and there is the piece of the castle wall at Sainte-Agnès built, who knows? It is something to have the past about you: in thinking on it one learns the lesson of history, which, this book says, is patience. It means patience with life, I suppose."

"That is all long ago," replied Antoine, "and I only know what I have been told and what I have read. It is not so long since the great Napoleon returned from Elba and sailed into the Golfe Jouan down the coast, and marched that night to Grasse. I wish I had been there on the beach to see him land. Supposing he should come back now!"

"Supposing Cæsar should come into the garden!"

"What would we do? Would we run?"

"No," I returned, "we would say, 'Good-afternoon, Monsieur Cæsar, we have heard a great deal about you, and we have always wanted to meet you. Will you not take that chair and sit with us a while? It squeaks, but perhaps you do not mind. I shall ring for some chocolate. So. Permit me to state my appreciation of your books; I have read them all with pleasure. Would it be impertinent to inquire what you are writing at present? I'm sure you must be working on something. My friend and I were but now talking of the old days and how you Romans called the water there the Bay of Peace. That, at least, is not changed, but I imagine you found many new things along the Aurelian Road; automobiles, and hotels, and villas, and perhaps the Marseilles express went by on the hillside. Won't you tell us something about the past? We want to escape the present.'"

Jeannette appeared with chocolate. "Jacques comes," she announced.

He came with eyes like saucers.

"I have it!" he cried. "I have it!"

"What have you?" we echoed. "What have you?"

"The farm!"

"Where?"

"In Canada. They call them homesteads. I have read in the paper. And they give them away free! Free! What would you? Monsieur does not need the money now to have a farm. Do you go, Monsieur?"

"Why not?" I mused. "It would be an adventure."

SASKATCHEWAN

THE QUEST

I

I BECOME A HOMESTEADER

SOCIAL distinctions were sloughed as I moved westward. In Chicago, a waitress at the station lunch counter inquired with assurance, "Employee's check?"

"No," I made return, and then to satisfy a piqued curiosity summoned courage to venture, "Why?"

"Thought you might be a brakeman."

I looked upon my hands to see if the tokens of agriculture already advertised them. Grimy to be sure they were, but the deposit appeared more smoky than earthy.

"What made you think me a brakeman?"

"Because of your coat. It's sheepskin. Railroaders wear them kind."

"So do farmers."

"You a farmer? And spring coming on! I envy you. Pay at the desk."

That night in the tourist sleeping-car I did not

envy myself. All through the hours of darkness the thin quaverings of a baby pierced the berth bulkheads, and across the aisle the droning voice of an irritated female steadfastly compared sundry annoyances of travel with the comforts of home. No replies came from her spouse. Perhaps he had gained wisdom and silence, and lay mere unresponsive clay; perhaps, and here envy did consume me, he had received the recompense of deafness. Who was I to complain if he that was wedded to this mechanism of speech had no fault to find? In the morning he came forth fresh and smiling and bade us an untroubled salutation.

Fashions have changed since the first emigrant cars went into the West. Between their unsoftened boards and the abounding cushions of the standard sleeper is offered a compromise in fare and fittings,—the tourist sleeping-car. Polished and varnished was our coach, and the interior toned to a pleasant yellow against which the black seats of leather wrote invitation. A strip of carpet traversed the aisle; if you were steady on your legs, or, before promenading waited for the train to halt, there was no occasion for missing this superior path. In our pride the porter reminded us that we

traveled somewhat inferiorly. He sat apart in contemplation wrapped, and no electric push buttons were distributed to command his presence. We must go to him for our needs, to be comforted as his judgment dictated. The coddling of tourist-car passengers was not in his book of rules. We could rub our own shoes.

Instead, we rubbed acquaintance. A miss of fewer years than fingers was unable to resist the attraction of my open lunch basket, and came to sit beside me.

"You married?" she asked, accepting a slice of angel food cake with no hypocrisy.

I told the truth.

"Why aren't you?"

"Nobody will have me."

"Why won't they have you?"

"I give it up."

"Why don't you try lots of people?"

"Such a bother."

"Why don't you try that girl over there?" pointing across the way to a maiden of marriageable age, who through the day had barricaded herself behind the new magazines.

"For one thing, I don't know her."

"I'll ask her for you!" and before I could prevent, my matchmaker had attacked the barricade.

"You married?"

"No," replied the maiden of marriageable age.

"Neither is that man."

Silence.

"Neither is that man."

The besieged said nothing.

Unquestionably, thought I, she must perceive how matters are drifting and how can she ever hope to better her estate if she is not willing to lend a hand?

"Will you marry him?" the besieger put it flatly.

"Certainly."

We two the most concerned laughed together, and I made for the smoking compartment at the end of the strip of carpet. A mixed assembly continued their talk.

Quoth an Alaskan, big of frame, slow of speech, quick of wit: "Shakespeare just about said it all when he said what he had to say."

On my right a boisterous Illinois native explained the culinary art as applied to fishes. "The best way to cook a carp," he concluded, "is to plank it. Then throw away the——"

"Enough," a Vancouver merchant interrupted. "We eat our salmon."

"Prince Rupert?" an uncollared individual whom failure had about the throat gave answer to a question thrown into our laps. "Prince Rupert in British Columbia? I've never been there. They say it's a whirlwind." He twirled a noticeable collar button and requested a match.

"How about Calgary?" queried a soft-voiced French-Canadian. "Twenty-five years old, and fifty thousand people. That's not too bad."

"Calgary?" returned an Alberta rancher. "Not worth standing room on a stony quarter section. Have an eye to Edmonton."

"I had bad luck for nine years, and then it changed for the worse," said the keeper of the collar button. "Whereabouts is this Edmonton?"

None of us, save possibly the uncollared individual, were what the world could smile upon and call broken men. Unless I err in judging, my companions had worked with hands and head for what they possessed. Their fathers had curtly said, "I leave you the world in which to make a way. Go make it." Their courage was still untarnished or they would not have been in this smoking com-

partment traveling westward. You may say what you will, live in the East, and talk wisely or longingly of the West, write prettily with a fire at your feet and wife and children at ease in the evening circle. In the filtered light of stained windows you may speak lengthily and with fitting gestures from the pulpit or sing Te Deums tunefully from the choir, but on the raw prairie life is not the beautiful, ecstatic thing related in Sabbath School. In one syllable, it is hard, and again hard. With this word I was to become better acquainted. There are certain recompenses, and with these also I was to become acquainted.

"The trouble with this flat country," said the Alaskan, "is that you can see too much of it. You can see more than you can get."

The northern prairie town is a type of its own. In the Dominion of Canada, five hundred miles west of Winnipeg and in the Province of Saskatchewan (I once was asked whether the province lay east of Quebec or west of British Columbia!) you may find Swift Current. If more specific directions are needed, I would suggest that you follow the Canadian Pacific Railway. The plains swing out to the four points from the station. Unkempt, unconcerned, assured, the future city brazens through its

youth with no apologies. It thinks in terms of dollars; it dreams of railroad surveys; if it worships at all, it worships advancing real estate prices and the wheat harvests to come. There is but one condition in thought or speech and that heads the eternal "*If* we have a good crop this year——" For Swift Current, heedless of the past, regardless of the present, clutches eagerly at the future. What is the past, after all, when you drive back the wilderness and wring a living from the soil? And what is the present when you make history every day?

The clear-eyed men who herd in the bars to lull the too poignant passion of living, and who group on the board sidewalks to build and demolish visions, have found the answer. It tells in the calm of their wind-burned faces, in the set of their shoulders, in their quiet, confident talk and quick, flooding laughter. Here, an English mechanic or a Cambridge graduate; there, a North Dakota settler or Minnesota woodsman or Ontario farm hand; yonder, French, Germans, Swedes, Irish, Welsh, and Scotch. Young men in a young country: they are content. And beyond content for you as you understand it, and for me as I take it, what is there in any country?

I asked of myself this question; then in the morning I climbed the stairs to the land office and paid the twenty dollars for my filing papers on a half-section of virgin prairie.

I had become a homesteader!

II

I SET FOOT ON MY HOMESTEAD

IF you have never followed a furrow, your pulse would not have beat in time to mine when I set foot on my three hundred and twenty acres of land. Beside me, in the crammed land office the day before, an Irishman, bent and toil-twisted, broke down when his papers of proprietorship were given him. "Three hundred and twenty acres!" he sobbed aloud. "Mine! Oh, God! Oh, God!" A clerk behind the railing glanced up with unsympathetic eye. "Not so much noise!" was the command.

That night I tracked an unknown trail twenty miles south. The prairie splattered on either side as does mud when you plant a heel, but vast, inscrutable was this mud, and for all I knew the only thing that marched upon it was myself. From midnight to dawn I slept burrowed in a straw pile, and in the morning on setting forth, the driver of a passing team hailed me aboard his wagon. There

were fifteen miles to go, and I willingly accepted a seat.

"Homesteader?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Where's your land?"

I told my section, township, and range numbers.

"You have the west half of nine!" he exclaimed. "Why, fellow, then you're a neighbor of yours sincerely. I was wondering who would get that piece. Say, Mister, I've been running my stock in your coulée. Any objections?"

"None."

"Any stock?"

"Only myself."

"Where's your lumber and junk?"

"I've been thinking I might get you to haul it out for me."

"That's a good bet. Ever do any farming?"

"I've read about it."

"Campbell?"

"Who's he?"

"The fellow who invented dry farming."

"No, I read Bellcamp."

"Who's he?"

"The jigger who invented wet farming."

The driver flicked his whip. "My name is

Hewes," he remarked at length. "Shouldn't wonder but what you and me are going to be friends."

"Nothing else," I returned, and gave him my name. Then and there began my friendship with Billy Hewes, which has endured to this day.

"When did you file?" I continued.

"Last fall and built my shack this spring. Eighteen by eighteen, a door with real hinges, and two windows with genuine glass. I made my mansion square so if a big wind comes along and rolls it over, all me and my wife will have to do is to sort the furniture and start where we left off. You married? No? Why not? Bashful? Well, I hate to discourage you, but where we're going there's only two white girls within a radius of twenty-five miles who speak English. Fat word, radius. Know what it means?"

"Sort of a half-brother to a diameter?"

"Can you cook?"

"Friend, I have yet to burn water when I boil it."

"Mother, mother, pin a cactus bloom on me. Do you think you will like this here homesteading?"

"Why not?"

"I was just wondering. Sometimes it seems to me like standing on a red-hot stove. A cowpuncher turned homesteader! Would you believe it? I

want to get back where people don't run inside when they see you coming down the trail. Don't lose any sleep. I'm going to stick if it takes all the hair. Some folks that can read and write think there's only icicles and polar bruins thirteen months of the year in Saskatchewan. I was talking to a fellow the other day. Not quite so green that the cows would eat him, this fellow wasn't, but verging so close his brains could blow up and never muss his hair. I said to him, 'What neck of the woods do you scatter from?' He thought it over a spell, and then he up and made answer. 'Neck of the woods?' says he. 'I haven't seen any woods around here, and I've been in these parts nigh on to a year.' Same with me; I haven't seen any polar bears. Wait until I get a few good crops or till I prove up my land, and maybe I'll ramble and see some. All this prairie will be worth something some day. Who located you?"

"Nobody. A chap in the hotel told me the west half of section nine was still open and was good. Triscott was his name, and he said he lived close by it. So I took a chance and filed blind."

"You win," returned Hewes. "The claim is all right. Was it handsome Tom Triscott, the English lad, who told you? He ought to know. He's

worn a path across your place coming to the house after butter and eggs. You will be the last settler to trek into our neighborhood. All the rest of the land is taken, and most every half-section proudly boasts a shack. We will be getting civilized and washing before meals some day. Did you bring plenty of tobacco with you? A neighbor told me he ran short of chewing not long ago, and that night he hit the pig over the head with a broom and broke the handle out, then he kicked the calf and talked back to madam, and then he walked four miles and borrowed a plug. You don't need any medicine. Another neighbor told me if a man was deaf and tickled his ear with a crow's feather he would hear better than before, and if he had the whooping cough and crawled under a gooseberry bush he wouldn't whoop no more. I haven't seen a crow, but I understand there's a gooseberry bush or two around. I trust you aren't believing all I tell you. Have you had any breakfast? Here's what's left of mine."

The dried bread sufficed until we drew near two rows of large, unpainted houses set like boxes on the bare prairie. "You're wondering where the barns are," remarked Mr. Hewes. "They and the houses are one and inseparable, you might say.

It's a handy rig to have your barn in your back parlor, so long as the horses don't object. Who are these people? Mennonites, whatever that is, and they speak a kind of German and come from Russia by way of Manitoba. You may laugh at some of their doings, but I wish to rise and respectfully state if it wasn't for them you wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be here, and Saskatchewan wouldn't be growing the wheat she does. Man, five years gone there was nothing between Swift Current and the Montana line except country. Then a year ago, the rush started, and now there isn't enough land left for a hen to scratch. What did it? In the beginning, thirty odd years ago, the C. P. R., but that's ancient history now, and folks are commencing to forget that the men who laid those rails across the continent had nerve and that they waited more than one year for the prairie to fill. Then the Mennonites. They came and they proved this country could grow wheat. The first winters they nigh froze to death and starved, but the government —and let me tell you the Canadian government is a good one—stayed by them and helped 'em out, gave 'em the right to live together in villages like that and own farm land outside, same as they do in dear old Russia or Germany or wherever they

come from, and now look at them! Do those houses appear like a summer zephyr would move 'em over into the next township? I guess those horses in that pasture aren't sleek as moles, and those cattle fat as butter? The Mennonite isn't strong on paint, and he eats roasted sunflower seeds, and grins while he eats, but he doesn't let his stock stand in the shade of a three-strand barbed wire fence the year round. That plowed strip you saw back there will grow thirty-five bushels of wheat to the acre this summer, and you will be along this way in the fall trying to buy potatoes out of those gardens. Wherever you see good buildings you see good land, and vice-vice, as the old lady said. Saskatchewan, a desert half the year and a frozen clod the other half! Seven hands 'round! Those fellows paid for their buildings right out of the soil. They didn't come in here with no one or two or three thousand dollars in cold cash in their jeans like most of these up-to-date homesteaders. They came with a stiff backbone, same as you and me, and that's all. Twenty years gone by, folks said North Dakota was a desert, but I never saw a desert yet worth fifty dollars, fifty large, round silver dollars, an acre. Twenty years from now what will this land be worth? Maybe you can tell; I can't. Keep your

trusty right eye on the slow-moving Mennonite, son, if you want to become a prairie farmer. You can't do better. That's as certain as a railroad going through any homesteader's slice of land. Which is some certain, believe William Hewes. Enough, William; the gentleman's ears ache."

It was a windy, sunny noontime when we drove into Hewes' unfenced barnyard. A shepherd dog with markings of black and yellow, and moody, brown eyes came from the house with leaps and barks to greet the returned master, but when he saw a stranger he quieted his tail and watched me with perceptibly wrinkled nose. Two black and white kittens followed. One leaped upon the wagon wheel and coolly snubbed me by turning its head aside; the other rolled upon its back and pawed with four feet, begging for its stomach to be scratched. Hens at work on the dwindling, refuse-covered snow bank in the lee of the corral had their feathers blown on end, and tottered like old ladies encumbered with many clothes. A pair of horses continued to lie comfortably in the sunshine, absorbing the welcome, novel glow from ears to hoofs, and a spirited pig aroused himself from repose under a hay rake and moved off, volleying grunts of protest.

"Home, sweet home," quoth Hewes, throwing down the reins. "You'll stay for dinner. I'll tell the missus we're here. Hold on, now. Shouldn't wonder but what you would like to see your land. That's the road allowance running along my fire guard, and there's the corner stake, and for a half-mile east and a mile south, everything you behold is yours."

I walked to the iron stake and found chiseled on one side the Roman numerals VIII, X, XIII. For a mile south and a half-mile east everything was mine! I stepped upon my land. . . . It has been remarked that perhaps your pulse would not have quickened. It is no intent of mine to endeavor to set my emotions to words. The only redress I can offer is the suggestion (if you are interested) that you also sally forth and go homesteading.

III

I FEEL THE ROMANCE

THERE followed long days when Hewes and I freighted my lumber and household goods over the trail from Swift Current. Days when the sky was unclouded blue and the wind absent, and in sprawling, communicative ease we lolled forward through the sunshine, and days when the sun was behind thick, shifting curtains, and the attacking wind cut to the bone, and in the mute misery of cold we stalked beside the horses for the comfort of warm and circulating blood. The frost was out of the ground, and sometimes the road lay smooth and the bottom hard; sometimes we steered among the outcropping rocks of a ridge or around the treacherous mire of hollows or through sloughs running flush with the glassy snow water of spring. Always the wheel hubs chucked on the axles, the tug chains clanked, the wagon creaked, and the jarring load gave forth its chorus of music as we doggedly progressed, three miles an

hour, across that immensity of unobscured space specked with the white of winter-drifted gullies. When the mood gripped, we talked protractedly, conversation without beginning or end or plot that dealt in relics of experience, remnants of successes and disasters, tales wanderers on the globe had brought to us, and the men who had never returned to tell the tale. Discarded eagernesses, balked desires, unsatisfied fancies, postponed hopes, we gave them all to each other in the comradeship of the trail without shame and with no plea for sympathy but to heighten the entertainment of the hour. I listened in silence, and grew to perceive the poise and independence of character that life in the open may give a man. Billy Hewes harkened without comment, and never again spoke from the instinctive contempt the Western man feels for the Eastern, or attempted to rasp me on the raw as he had that first day.

By night we couched under the wagon, and before sleep took our senses watched the Northern Lights lick the sky white and heard the hobbled horses cropping and the lamentations of the coyotes. Once, seeking novelty, we took shelter in a Mennonite home. Entrance into the house was a matter easily accomplished after we had stabled our beasts.

We merely passed through a door and were in the living-room. It was large and gloomy as a cave of the fairy tales, and the earth made the floor. From a station on the table by the window, a single lamp with smudged chimney feebly shot a segment of light into the darkness. A dog barked at us from somewhere, and in a corner a boy sat and coughed horridly and spat upon the ground. A clock solemnly ticked the seconds between his seizures, and a youth at the table unconcernedly mended a coat with decisive sweeps of the needle. In an opposite corner was the stove; there moved two brown-garbed, concave-chested women, who bent their turbaned heads over our supper. Mother and daughter; it was difficult to decide which figure had lived the longer. The cookery must have been conducted by touch and smell. I could not understand how sight played a part at such distance from the lamp. We sat on a bench against the wall and made advances in German, to which our hosts replied in timorous English. One youth handled a dictionary and hunted down the new words that fell his way when we spoke in our language. "Chilly" set the pages fluttering, and when a thumb rested on the quarry, the huntsman confirmed our judgment with many bendings of

the neck. A girl stood in the doorway regarding us with the unblinking attention one gives curiosities. She carried in her arms what I thought was a doll, but when I waggishly inquired for its age, she replied seven months and that the name was Jacob. At intervals thereafter Jacob opened wide his mouth and issued yells of prodigious quantity in a language all his own. When we took seats at the table in the fragment of light, the family life continued undisturbed. In the next room, under a second lamp, more children assiduously cleaned fish. Surprised at the spectacle, I inquired whence came the material for these labors. A stripling who clopped about with bare feet thrust into half-slippers stood still a sufficient time to reply that he and his brothers had an hour ago returned from a seining expedition to Lac Peletier

"Are not your feet cold?" I asked.

"Oh yes," he answered, resuming his shuffling. "But they are not wet as they were."

For supper we fared on bread, butter, eggs, and coffee, and then three forks of hay were thrown upon the floor, a pair of blankets was spread, and our bed resulted. A lantern succeeded the lone lamp, and it developed that the benches upon which we sat became bunks for four men. The tops were

lifted away, the sides miraculously pulled out, and the couches were prepared. Hewes and I fearfully crept between the blankets in our corner, there was a patter of prayers from the bunk quartet, and the light expired. Beyond the wall my elbow touched, horses stamped and blubbered, and cows sniffed and shook their stanchions. Differences arose during the night, and I heard the rod of chastisement righteously applied. In the morning, he of the bare feet addressed me:

"Not good for sleep last evening. The horses fight too loud."

It would be more than ungrateful for me whom they have so often fed and made warm to disparage their domestic arrangements, but for myself, I do not relish bickering creatures in my antechamber when sleep is my intent. Thereafter I asked of the Mennonites board without lodging.

From them and from the freighters on the trails, from Hewes and my other neighbors, I heard the story of the past winter: of the snow banks that closed over the windows, of solitary homesteaders in the white monotony losing their reason for a time and mumbling to themselves; of families without coal or food who braved the cold with unshaken courage, boiling wheat over buffalo chips and track-

ing jack-rabbits for the necessary meat; of cattle bellowing from hunger; of starved horses dying in harness and teamsters freezing beside them; of thirty and forty degrees below zero, the smoke ascending in a straight column and the sun swinging its low, southern arc over a silent world; of the three-day blizzards, when the powdered snow drove thick as flour and men fought for breath in the hazardous journey between house and barn, and stock on the unsheltered range drifted drowsily with the wind; of the Mounted Police who steadfastly made their patrol to offer the aid that a generous, efficient government provided.

That was one corner of the picture, and for a moment it enabled me to see things in the large. Men may freeze, but the world must be fed: it is the chief business of life. For centuries these empty, Northwest plains have awaited the plow, have called for men and women, and to-day the summons is heeded. Across seas shiploads hasten, up from the States trainloads crowd: peoples coming to feed themselves and to help feed the world; driven by no coercion of faith or government but by an inborn, conquering desire for adventurous betterment; rushing upon the land gladly, triumphantly, with a laugh on their lips and confidence in

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their hearts and determination in their minds. The resistless march of empire into the last West! Behold a new nation building with incredible rapidity on tested foundations: a nation that has all the mistakes of history for guidance and all the instruments of science and art and civilization for furtherance. What will be the result? I do not know; you do not know; Canada does not know. The opportunity for good craftsmanship is without parallel, and I hope the achievement will be strong and enduring and beautiful. Meanwhile, the marvelous romance that whirls around me quite takes my breath away.

IV

I BUILD A HOUSE

THERE came a day when I stood before my lumber, a piled assortment of shingles, flooring, drop siding, ship lap, and dimension stuff, and wondered where to begin. A house must somehow rise from this, I reflected, and scratched my head.

"Good-morning," said a voice, and I turned to find a man beside me, regarding my material and myself.

"Good-morning," I replied.

"Heard you were going to build," he continued, coming directly to the point. "Do you need a hand?"

"Can you build a house?"

"Can you architect? I'm not a carpenter by trade, but I can drive nails. You say how you want this built and we'll build it."

He was tall and straight, and smoked a pipe and had white teeth and strong hands. He looked me in the eye.

"What's your price?" I inquired.

"Twenty cents an hour, and you keep the time."

"Begin."

The pipe disappeared in a hip pocket, and the white teeth vanished behind a yellow mustache. "Where are your tools?" he asked. "And what size do you want this shack?"

"Twelve by twelve," I answered, and sketched on a shingle the location of the two windows and the door. He listened to my explanations and rubbed his hands expectantly.

"That's enough," he interrupted. "You make a couple of saw horses out of that siding while I get these four by sixes notched for sills." He had his sleeves rolled up and a tool in his hand before I could off with my coat. Thereafter I moved more quickly and found small time for conversation. By noon the sills were joined and leveled, and he was selecting two by fours for studding.

"Twelve o'clock," I suggested.

"My name is Brunswick," he stated as he rolled down his sleeves. "Richard, Dick, or Dicky,—suit yourself. You come and eat dinner with me. Biscuits and bean soup on the bill-of-fare to-day."

When we had walked a half-mile in silence, he spoke again.

"Ever been in York state?"

"Several times."

"It's the handsomest country that lays out of doors. It makes your mouth water. This is a hell of a country. Prairie, prairie, always prairie. No trees, no rivers, no fences, no roads, no nothing. A hell of a country. I wish to God I was dead and out of it."

I could not refrain from laughing as I measured the width of his shoulders.

"Laugh and be damned," he said without heat. "You're new at this homesteading game. Wait a month. Wait till you've stayed day after day in your shack and listened to the wind and had only yourself to talk with. Wait till you've cooked your grub for week after week and sat down by yourself to eat it. Wait till you've lain all night and listened to the coyotes yapping and cursed yourself for a fool. And just wait until you've walked your fourteen miles over to Notre Dame and your fourteen miles back—city of twenty Frenchmen is Notre Dame d'Auvergne, with a post-office, a store, and a bake shop—for letters that never come. The white lights of Broadway will cry to you then."

We walked on in silence.

"They look good to me," he continued. "Many's

the time I've jumped up in the middle of the night and rolled my blankets; shaved and put on my best shirt, and hit the trail to Swift Current, never wanting to see my homestead again. I'd swear to myself that I would never return. Then after I'd gone two miles or three miles, I'd stop and stare at the ground, and before I knew what happened, I'd be back in the shack again. It's too miserable lonely a life for a white man."

"Then why the devil do you stay?" I asked.

"That's my breaking, a whole ten acres," he replied. "And there's my home, a dry-goods case," pointing to an unpainted shack that resembled a box-car rid of its wheels. "You'll have to sit on the bunk or on the floor. There are no chairs on this ranch."

"But why do you stay?" I persisted.

"Because I can't help it," he answered. "I hate it: I hate it all like poison, but, my God! I love it, too. Now watch me make biscuits. Which do you want? Tea or coffee?"

I reclined upon a bunk built into one corner while Richard, Dick, or Dicky mixed his dough. A shelf that was also the dining-table extended along the opposite wall, and on this he sprinkled flour and dumped the mass and applied a tomato

can for rolling pin. "Fire up the stove," the baker commanded, "and keep an eye on the bean soup. We're coming with the sinkers."

He snatched the top from a baking powder tin and cut neat circles in his preparation. The pan was whisked into the oven, and then he sat beside me and panted. "That's how it's done," he commented. "The quicker, the better. You mustn't let your paste get cold. It's hard work; I'd rather build houses. The trouble with burning buffalo-chips is that you're kept so busy shoveling in fuel and shoveling out ashes you haven't time to cook. Odd smell that smoke has. After you've once whiffed it, you'll never forget it. How's the soup doing?"

When the broth bubbled, he plucked forth the biscuits and kicked a soap box from under the shelf. "I have got a chair," he grinned. "Come sit on it. I'll stand up. Can you manage without butter? And there's only one bowl. Sure, I'll eat my soup out of the kettle. Pan Handle Pete, I am. Who are you?"

"Tin Can Timothy, and pleased to make your acquaintance. Butter or no butter, your sinkers are fine, Pan Handle."

"Are they, though?" He flushed with pleasure.

"The only other opinion I ever had expressed on them was by a flicker tail."

"What may a flicker tail be?"

"That's North Dakota for gopher. One of these witless, little brown beasts that scoot around the prairie and sit up like a tent peg and squeak. Haven't you seen 'em?"

"So many I believe I shall name my place 'Flicker Tail Farm.'"

"It wouldn't be bad. Well, I made a batch of biscuits one day and had poor luck; something was wrong,—too much flour or too little soda or the dough got cold. I was standing in the doorway gnawing on one and pretending to myself it was fit to eat when a gopher come along and looked me over. I threw the biscuit and hit him in the head, and the gopher hiked for his hole. Just before he went in he stopped and sat up and put both front paws on his cranium. That's the only other opinion I ever had passed on my sinkers."

"So you love and hate this life?"

"That's it. I suppose I should be man enough to make up my mind which, but I can't. Some days I nigh go crazy with misery; other days I'm peaceful and content as a bug in a rug. If I had some horses or some stock to take care of, if I had some

hard work to do, then I wouldn't hate it so bad. Sometimes I get so sick of myself for steady company that I go out and dig holes and fill them up again just to get away from Richard Brunswick. But things might be worse. So I tell myself when I'm in here after supper with the dishes washed and the old stove heating up and it's storming and cold outside, and I've got my pipe going and my feet cocked in the oven, and I'm reading some magazine four years old. 'Richard, my boy,' says I, 'you've knocked around, you've been to the Islands, to Australia, to the Klondike, to the Argentine, to Europe, you've been here and you've been there, you've done this and you've done that, you've seen more than your share, and what did it ever do for you? What if Broadway is a million miles away to-night, and if you stick your head out the door you can't see a light in all blooming creation? Where did you ever sleep under your own roof before you came to the prairie? Answer me that. Yes, you might be drawing your hundred or better a month back on the Central firing a bloody compound that eats up coal faster'n you can heave it, you might be down on the plates of the *Lusitania* rolling sweat and swinging a shovel, but where would you be before the next pay day come around?

Busted; cold, stony busted. Then back to the boiler door for yours. Stay with the land, my lad. It will do better for you than the shovel.'"

"Do you think it will?" I asked.

"It can't do me any worse. I'm willing to give it a chance. Though it's not only the money coming that keeps me here. It's just the fun of taking a piece of this damned, God forsaken prairie and trying to make it fit for folks like you and me to live on. Trying to make this land that has never been scratched, that is raw and untamed, produce and grow wheat. Do you know what I mean? I guess you do or you wouldn't be in Saskatchewan sitting on a soap box eating bean soup. And then this shack. It's a hovel, I know; it leaks and there are cracks between the siding and the wind blows through: back east we wouldn't stable a horse in here, but I built the thing myself and I paid for the lumber, and I can come in and shut the door and tell the whole world to go to hell. Why, sometimes the joy of the thing grabs me and grips till I near holler. Do you know what I mean? You'd better not say you don't."

"I say what I please. I know what you mean."

"You're the only person besides myself that ever ate in this house. I'm glad you came. It does a

man good to talk with a human being once in a while. Let's get back to work. I'll leave the dishes go."

When seven o'clock came the studding was set and braced and the plate spiked down. Brunswick straightened his back and felt for his pipe.

"Where are you staying at nights?" he asked between long puffs.

"With Tom Triscott, but he's gone to town to walk on board sidewalks. Guess I'll sleep outside to-night."

"No, you come with me. Boiled rice for fodder this evening; flapjacks for breakfast. You won't get hog fat, but you'll have some one to talk with, and so will Richard."

I was his guest that night and the next, and the next, and on while the house developed under our hands. We worked ten hours a day, cooked our meals, and walked four miles back and forth. We talked and dreamed carpentry and together solved the problems of the trade. Richard had not another thought in his head, but labored with the zeal of an artist, cursing when a nail flew from under his hammer, smiling with satisfaction when a sawed length fitted snugly. He was easing the long thwarted desire of brain and muscle for employ-

ment. "Oh, hit her another belt," he would say, when I wished a halt for food. By the end of ten days the exterior was shingled, the floor was laid, and the walls were ceiled.

"It's a tight shack," he said. "As tight a shack for its size as you will find in Saskatchewan. Shingles and siding and tar paper on the outside, tar paper and ship lap on the inside,—I think the wind can't get through that. Where are you going to put your stove?"

"In the corner between the two windows," I replied. "And the bed springs in the opposite corner. I'll hinge those springs against the wall so they can be pushed up out of the way in the daytime. Here's where I'll build a desk, over there a washstand, and in that space a clothes closet."

"Sure thing," he commented. "Where does the piano go? Hello, who's that?"

A youth of slow step approached and knocked on the open door.

"Howdy," he remarked.

"Howdy," we returned.

"Fine day, to-day."

"It is."

He squinted at his shoes and produced a plug of tobacco.

"Chew?"

"No, thanks."

"Chew, Mister?" he asked Richard.

"Much obliged; just took one."

The stranger clamped his jaws, wrenched away the slab, and sighed. "Nice place to build here. You can see up and down the coulée, though there ain't ever nothin' startlin' and new to see. Neighborly to the Hewes. Know Hewes? Fine man. He pulled our team out of a mudhole once when we got stalled. Helped us up Sheep Ranch Hill once, too. Never charged nothin'. Know Mrs. Hewes? Fine woman. She gave me some medicine for a cough 'bout a month ago. I lost the medicine, but I got shet of the cough. I 'spect I must be ramblin'."

"Don't hurry," answered Brunswick. "Give us a lift on this stove, will you, Mr.——"

"You're darn tootin'. Carter's my name; G. Wainwright Carter. I live down the flat. What's your name? Is it? I wouldn't have thought that was your name. Would have thought it was Meadowbrook or Fitzgerald or something. You look like some of the Meadowbrooks and Fitzgeralds down in Caroliny. I know that other fellow's name. My folks in the flat think he's a damn fool

to spend money for to put shingles on a shack. I tell 'em no; this country 'round here has got to have shingles some day. I've been here a year without seein' shingles and I'm glad the first has come." The drawling words never ceased as he worked. His arms flayed, and his thin legs, inclosed in torn overalls, snapped like a pair of scissors. "Say, you," he addressed me, "have you got any horses?"

"Not yet."

"How you goin' do your plowin'?"

"This spring I shall have to hire it done."

"That's what I says to myself. 'He will have to hire it done.' Here's Hewes busy with his land, and Tom Triscott busy with his'n when he ain't gaddin' 'round or trailin' to Swift Current, and Mr. Brunswick, I reckon he ain't got no horses else he'd be busy in the field, too. Same with the rest of the neighbors, either busy or nothin' to be busy with. And here's me, with horses and nothin' to do till seedin' time. Why? 'Cause I've been here a year and I broke last summer. You see? So I says to myself, 'I'll mosey up there and see if I can't do his breakin' for him.'"

"What kind of an outfit have you?" I asked.

"Two mules and two oxen and a ridin' plow.

I can break better'n an acre and a half a day. It'll cost you three dollars an acre, and I feed my own grain. A steam plow would cost you three and a half and wouldn't do the work no better. Besides, there's none to be had in these parts. How much breakin' would you want done?"

"Twenty acres. When can you begin?"

His black eyes opened wide, then the lids fluttered.

"To-morrow mornin'. Mister, I'm much obliged. My dad's down sick, and we've nothin' to eat in the house 'cept oatmeal. I'll plow you your fireguard and it won't cost you a cent. So long."

Before G. Wainwright Carter had turned the twenty acres on the bench east of the house, I had completed the desk and washstand and clothes closet. I may truthfully say I plowed half of the tract. We tried many combinations of two mules and two oxen. His first theory that a four-in-hand, oxen to the front, would do well proved a failure for the excellent reason that the cattle refused to pull. Though I walked to one side and lashed unflaggingly, or handled the reins and called encouragement from the rear, they would not tighten the traces. Theirs was not the forward spirit of leaders, and no amount of goading could instil initia-

tive. Finally, they lay in the furrow and groaned over the perversity of men.

"Wouldn't it make a fellow swear and chew tobacco?" commented G. Wainwright.

"Did you ever before have these beasts to a plow?" I asked.

"No, they've never been worked." Foreseeing anger gathering in my eye, he added, hastily, "I thought they would go all right. They look fit, now don't they?"

"Fit for beefsteak and shoe leather," I retorted. "How did you do your plowing last fall?"

"Had the mules and two horses."

"Where are the horses?"

"They died in the winter. Colic, I reckon. Lots of snow there was last winter. A rancher north of the Saskatchewan River lost a thousand head of steers. He found them when the storm was by froze in the snow and standin' up. Cattle are different from horses. They won't paw the snow away from the grass so much, and when they get cold they won't move 'round to get warm; they just hump up and freeze to death."

"Let's try the donkeys for leaders."

Again we met failure. The mules were willing for their share, but to drag the oxen in addition

was more than should be expected, and they promptly balked. We experimented with the four hitched abreast. With the mules on the tongue, the cattle worked diversely, and their separation inclined them to wandering so that I must agilely skip from right to left to prod them into the proper course. G. Wainwright sat on the seat and chewed the tobacco that comforted him.

"My father," he announced, "went out to New Mexico. The cowboys, they shot the heels off his boots and the cigar out of his mouth, so my father come back. His father told him he would stock him up with a farmin' outfit if he stayed in Caroliny. It wasn't so. He wouldn't stock him up with a settin' hen."

When we reversed the arrangement of motive power our machine worked to the utmost efficiency our ingenuity could devise, and I had more time for interior carpentry. The furrow, I noticed from the window, turned slowly, but it turned day after day. Therein was my satisfaction.

V

I YIELD TO THE SPELL

THOUGH this house I have built cost less than a fortune, I would not sell it for two fortunes. Twelve feet by twelve feet are the exterior dimensions: it is presumed the interior is square in outline. When one cooks, eats, sleeps, handles a pen, and plays the harmonica within this magnitude, some faculty in apportionment of space is desirable. Between the two windows that give east and south squats the stove. For the sake of his purse, a seller of hardware in Swift Current frowned on my choice, and lauded the superiorities of an upstanding, ungainly article he was pleased to call a range. What sound merits founded the distinction I did not pause to learn. The word "Queen" was in ornamented, nickeled letters on the oven door of his favorite. On mine, stout cast-iron spelled "Pioneer." I remarked how more heroic seemed the last name: I hinted impropriety in taking the title to a bachelor's home. There would be no adept attend-

ants and no niceties of cookery, I assured the salesman.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he answered. "Suit yourself. That small one you fancy won't bake bread."

"My dear sir," I replied, "when was a pioneer ever expected to bake bread?"

So now the stove of my desire is in the corner, and we are well content with each other. It consumes the cow-chips I gather, and in return gives heat for the practice of domestic science. I have not endeavored the baking test. Why should I when Mrs. Hewes sells me better bread than my hands could make if they mixed dough for half a century? I do not regret the empty oven. If through negligence the porridge scorches or my fingers burn, I read the cast-iron words of the door, and am cheered to smile at the misfortunes of a Pioneer and a pioneer.

Hooked against the wall are the pots and skillets with which I labor three times a day. The stovepipe leads to the ceiling, over a shelf of my handicraft, covered with a white linoleum. Against this the brass heads of the retaining tacks stand out amazingly neat and shame the blackened bottom of the suspended dishpan. The polished top of the

bread-box beneath, reflects a pool of black; some day I must scour that dishpan. And I must also restore the cylindrical form of the metal flour bin, which lost its perfect shape from falling off a wagon. The desk on which I write is solidly joined of smooth, dovetailed flooring. It is as wide and as long as a desk should be; by day the south window concentrates the outdoor light on its surface, by night a student lamp focuses a pleasant glow; papers and books are never crowded to the floor. This desk is of correct height, and a semicircle cut in the edge admits the body to comfortable quarters, and the elbows to an agreeable support. The lower platform, notched for convenience of the legs, and boxed on one side into an extra capacious pigeon hole, offers storage for magazines and catalogues, and, when I crook my left foot over a round of the chair, a buttress for my knee. The untutored might call the production a double-decked table. I call it a desk. I built it myself, and have a right to the term.

A bookshelf above my shoulder holds my library of the hour. These are the volumes in order as they come: "The Arabian Nights," "Leaves of Grass," "Rolinda," "The Struggle for a Free Stage in London," "Don Quixote," "How to Live on

Twenty-four Hours a Day," "Alice-For-Short," Whitney's "French Grammar," "The Spell of the Yukon," Montaigne's "Essays," "The Essays of Elia," "*Contes Choisis*" of Guy de Maupassant, and "Æsop's Fables." How this collection came about, I am not prepared to say. Like most private libraries, it is largely a result of old attachments, an investigating spirit, and books loaned and borrowed, returned and not returned. The hinged bed springs are locked against the wall; the four-point Hudson's Bay blankets are folded upon the steamer trunk at their head. (When the bed is lowered, the eating table and rocking chair must skirmish for room as best they can.) In the space between trunk and door, are the bench for the water bucket and an unduplicated washstand, that happily combines the offices of lavatory and bureau. It is the piece of furniture that most excites the curiosity of visitors. It appears to have been fashioned on the proportions of mystery. The top is manifest enough: a basin set in cross bars, and a handful of toilet articles disposed on more of the white linoleum. Still, the uninitiated insist on seeing what is behind the door, and strive to conceal their disappointment when they behold my intimate wardrobe. What do they expect? Blood, bones, gold? I wish they

would tell me. The clothes closet against the other wall is larger and its door is as inscrutable, but their eyes pass by and come to the shelves for provisions that are built over the fuel box. This last they politely mistake for a window seat until I raise the lid, and when the store of fuel is appraised, they inquire concerning the trapdoor in the floor. It opens to the cellar, a divided pit into half of which a ton of coal will go, and into the other half I may descend by five steps of a ladder, and bring up the kerosene can or a pail of potatoes or the butter-jar. There remains for display the attic. One stands upon a chair, and projects a head through the removable section of ceiling to observe this triangular apartment, that slopes from a height of three feet and ten inches at the ridge pole to nothing at the eaves. I must remember the wall decorations,—a calendar, printed in red and black, and a three-quarter-length map of the North American continent. Such is my house within. You are asked not to forget that the nearest railroad supply station is thirty-five miles across the prairie, and that freighting charges are fifty cents a hundred.

Without, the shingles of the sides are stained a refreshing green, and those of the roof the same hue, in a darker tone. The trimmings and the win-

dow frames are white; the door preserves its natural color, intensified by applications of linseed oil, and set off with a knob of rubbed copper. If I were requested for adjectives to describe tersely this house, which I so much admire, I would say spick and span.

It is on the northwest corner of my half-section, at the rim of the dip to the coulée. From this apex, the upland widens to the east line, a half-mile distant. I count sixty acres in this wedge and twenty on the slope. Billy Hewes, to whom I go for interchange of opinions, adds ten. It is certain twenty of the level chocolate loam are broken, and twice as many acres remain. The coulée holds an hundred acres of black gumbo, and if my estimates and arithmetic are correct, one hundred and forty more lie beyond it on the slope and opposite bench. Three hundred and twenty acres given into my keeping: I have twenty acres plowed, and here is the first week of May, and seeding time upon me. Again you are informed that Swift Current is thirty-five miles away by trail. Perhaps you know what that means; perhaps you do not. We know that spring at last is over the land.

The season comes to the prairie with little of the pageantry in a country of woods and hills. The

wind has blown cold for days; this morning it takes a warmer breath, the sun shines hot, and I notice that the last bits of snow in the gullies are vanishing, and the meadow larks are mounting high and trailing their music like bright colored ribbons across the sky. Clouds are white and quiescent, massy patches of cotton pasted against the blue. In the wet sloughs the grass is putting out green shoots, and the croaker frogs are shrilling. The scattered sage-brush, that takes the place of trees with us, is silvering its leafage. A single crow—what is he doing this distance from the cornfields?—drops a salutation as he wings southward; hawks are hunting in low, darting curves; a pair of wild ducks searching up the creek bed for housekeeping grounds quack their distaste for neighbors, and veer from this undesirable locality. Tiny grasshoppers are stumbling over the earth, a troop of ants is marshaling across a buffalo wallow, and spiders, absorbed in home duties, are scuttling over rocks in haste for their destination. I observe that the grazing cows have each a wabbling calf to delight the eyes of Billy Hewes, and that his two mares crop in circles around the two colts that rest their doubled, unsteady legs. There are assemblies of purple crocuses met on the ridges, and in the hollows com-

panies of yellow buttercups and little white flowers hiding among gray, mossy stems. Big bottle flies are buzzing and boring against the window panes of the house, the snowbirds and the spry, black-throated fellows we call plowboys are pecking at the bread crumbs spread before the door. They must nest upon the earth, and rear their families in the scant protection of a tuft of grass, but they do not seem discouraged. Two young gophers are tumbling and leaping with unreasoning joy in the plowed fireguard. A rooster crows triumphantly from his perch on a wagon wheel in Hewes' yard. It is time well spent to lounge in the doorway, and to permit the dry, wind-driven heat to penetrate to the skin.

"Saw some antelopes down in the coulée!" shouts Billy as he rides by. "They're back from the White Mud Hills. Spring is here!"

Late this afternoon I requisitioned a chair, tilted it against the house out of the wind, and said to myself: "My home is built and furnished, there are twenty acres of plowing yonder to be seeded next week—between the tenth and thirty-first of May, the farm journals and the agricultural station experts and the Mennonites and myself agree is the proper time for planting flax—the fuel box is filled with prairie coal, the potatoes for supper are peeled

and soaking; I shall reflect and build visions after the manner of a homesteader. I shall need a barn. It will go against one of those rounded knolls. A bank barn is best, with stone walls; it is warmer and will last forever. I do not care for sod structures. There is a knoll with a natural roadway on either side: I'll remember it. Down below, where that vein of water escapes near the spring, a concrete trough should be made. A drain will carry the waste to the hayland beyond, where the grass grows long, and make better pasture for the cattle. White-faces, I believe I shall buy, when the time comes. A hundred or two would be a pretty picture on the flat. I might break up some of that gumbo and try alfalfa. That black soil is hard to plow, but once worked up, it yields big. If this country hasn't sufficient rainfall, I could dam the creek and irrigate. Then I'd always be sure of a crop. There should be a bridge across the creek. It's a nuisance to pull through with a heavy load. That's rich land on the other bench. I would like to have an hundred acres in wheat over there next year. Let me see: one hundred acres, thirty-five bushels to the acre, eighty cents a bushel——"

Then I saw Tom Triscott crossing the coulée. "After eggs from Mrs. Hewes," I determined,

when the pail dangling from his arm flashed in the sun.

It is one of the privileges of those who go into new countries to speculate innocently on what a man is bent when he shows himself beyond his doorstep. Tom Triscott is often in the thoughts of my neighbors. He will wander up and down the brook banks for hours because he likes "to see the muskrats and snakes puddling around in the water." He will spend afternoons riding his black horse, "Dynamite," from house to house on no specific errands, but "merely to keep up acquaintanceship." He will stay at home for a week at a time, his light will be the last extinguished, and the smoke of his breakfast fire the last to issue from his roof-jack. One morning he will be seen on the trail to Swift Current, and then no more of him for days. Among the sober-minded matrons for miles—they are not many!—he bids fair to become a warning for the profit of their sons, but not any of them can resist the winsome appeal of his blue eyes and laughing, impudent mouth. "If he wasn't so big, I'd kiss him and give him a cookie every time he comes near," said one. From their husbands he carelessly forces respect. He can ride a horse and handle a plow; though he asks no favors, he is always ready

to lend a hand; he talks little of himself, and his word is good. They style him "Handsome Tom," and do not understand him. His actions, they say among themselves, are ruled by whims, and who can sound a whimsical mind? It is known that he is an Englishman, has been to university, and roamed the world. Why he is a homesteader in Saskatchewan, nobody knows.

I watched him as he came up the slope. His body swung lightly from the hips; the curves of the chest and the lines of the limbs were strong and clean; his head was poised gallantly, the column of the neck swelled out to join the shoulders; he set his feet daintily and held control of his arms. When my greeting reached him, he flung up a hand and changed his course. "Meditating?" he asked. "I have the honor of announcing to you that spring has come. A mosquito bit me on the ear as I leaped the creek. Well, what do you think of all this?" He nodded at the prairie, and rolled a cigarette.

"From here you can look south twenty-five miles —almost halfway to the Montana line. It's not small enough to think about on a lazy day in spring."

"Yes? That's the first symptom of the effect of this wide sky and flat earth. You stay here long enough, friend of mine, and you won't care to think

about it at all; you will take everything for granted. These plains are so vast they conquer a man, mind and spirit; force him back upon himself to keep company with his soul. It makes most of us squirm. Interesting, isn't it, that unvarnished country should drive a man to know his immortal self? London and Paris and New York combined cannot accomplish that; all they teach a man is a number of ways of escaping from himself. What are you doing up here?"

He spoke now as an Easterner, with a host of allusions behind the question, and I pardoned it on that basis, as he knew I would and would not have done had he asked as a Westerner.

"Farming. What are you doing?"

"The truth never hurts, you know."

"Let's have it, then."

"Amusing myself," he laughed. "The same as you are. Satisfying the wanderlust, learning a new set of values, studying a cross-section of life, playing pioneer, becoming acquainted with my immortal soul. I find it a fascinating game, don't you? There are many things to watch, but best of all I like to watch the newcomers on the trail with their horses and oxen and outfits of machinery; the wagons, loaded with lumber and beds and stoves and

tables and chairs and the ware that goes into a house; the husband driving confidently forward, the wife sitting undismayed beside him. They are trekking, gambling with fortune, throwing dice with fate, taking up untried land, making themselves new homes, building a country. There are not many places remaining where you can see that. I wanted to see it, so I came. I'm not sorry. There's a barbaric joy in our pioneering if it is half make-believe. What if next year the railroads will be coming this way, and we shall be hauling our grain five miles to an elevator and dabbling in town lots? It is wholesome for a chap to do without luxuries a time, to forego the galleries and theaters and parks, and his own kind of people. Somehow, it makes him look life straight in the eyes, and see things as they are. It makes him appreciate how much has been done for him, and how little he has done for himself. Life here is simple and uncomplicated. We go back to the beginnings of the race. Our feet are on the soil; we claim kinship with the sturdy men who dared. We work,eat, and sleep, and never question if it is worth while. The prairie is a worthy master. I've been all over the British shop —India, Australia, South Africa—and some day I'll return home to England, but this minute I'd

rather be here than any place I know. Look at that!"

The low sun was poised above the western rim of land. It streamed yellow light down the coulée, and blacked the opposite banks with shadow. In the immense sky, every cloud had disappeared; the heavens capped the world like a blue bowl. Sunlight, sky, and earth—an immeasurable quantity of each—filled our vision.

"I shall want all that when I leave," continued Triscott. "I have heard men who have left here tell how the Northwest had always its hold upon them. It urged their return, was in their thoughts and dreams, took the smack of former pleasures from them, rendered insignificant the accepted significant things at home—birth, culture, money, and all that rot; mocked, pleaded, promised, and gave them no peace until they came back. These men talked of the long, long days of summer, and going to bed with the sun in the heavens; of the long nights of winter, the measureless sky, the Northern Lights, the interminable winds, the uncramped, out-of-door openness, the freedom from conventions. They were still drunken with this immensity of space. I wonder if I shall be as they? Will I ever be able to forget the prairie? And how about

you? For you also have followed the Long Trail. I know: you need not tell me. Most certainly the prairie weaves a magic spell around the heart of a man. It breaks the hearts of some of us, and others it makes into men. But all of us yield to the spell. Why is that, can you inform me?"

After supper, when the dishes were washed and the floor swept, I fetched the harmonica from its retreat. "Being held far above all others in the esteem of the harmonica playing public for over fifty consecutive years, is a record which says more for these instruments than words can convey." Thus remarks the pamphlet in the pasteboard box, making impertinent any praise from me. I play one air without halts and hesitations.

"You are satisfying the wanderlust, Tom Triscott," I reflected. "Learning a new set of values, studying a cross-section of life, playing pioneer, becoming acquainted with your immortal soul, and yet you ask me why we yield to the spell!"

VI

I AM GRIPPED BY THE FIEND

AT last it has come, the loneliness that the prairie casts upon you. What braggarts are we when we say to ourselves, "This shall never be to me; I shall escape that!" The states of mind Brunswick and Triscott and Carter have revealed when gripped by the fiend of the plains have caused me to smile to myself. I have listened to their shy blurtings, joked with them, read to them, made them eat my cooking, played on the harmonica, and from the depths of my ignorance half pitied their childishness of the moment. I know now how little they cared at the time for my remedies of jokes and reading, of food and music. They wanted to lose themselves in a crowd of human beings, to hear, see and touch strange people, to numb the pain that a stale brain inflicts, to laugh and shout and drink and make love, to have about them all the toys of civilization. They craved (with a craving only those who have experienced it can understand) the

life of city streets. They desired not the unskilled, awkward entertainment I offered, but the fluent, spirited festivity of practised performers on a larger stage. Our homestead theater had become so changeless, we were all speaking actors who knew our parts by rote, backward and forward, and mumbled without zest through the show: the scenery was never shifted; there were no gestures, winks, nods, shrugs, nudges, whisperings; no blunders, flounderings, flourishes, caperings, flutterings, quiverings; no fandangoes, cajoleries, witcheries, ecstasies, bewilderments; nothing to steal the senses, stagger belief, baffle description; nothing to conjure up visions, flood the heart with blood.

You must not think these men are weaklings. If you do, I propose that you journey five miles from your home, and live alone one week. It is not necessary that the verdict be told me. Perchance you cry from the depths of your chair, "I have gone into the woods for a month with only an Indian for companion, and I have never whimpered. What stuff this fellow writes!" My friend, I also have gone into the woods. They are not the same as the prairie.

Brunswick came to my door yesterday noon as I broke eggs for the frying pan. He sat on the

fuel box, and sucked his empty pipe and said nothing. So I, knowing nothing to say, was silent and placed another plate on the table. "Draw up, Richard," I urged, when the coffee was poured.

Without removing the hat from his head or the pipe from his mouth, he took the chair, and leaned against the wall. "Fried eggs," he muttered to himself. "My God! Fried eggs."

I cut the bread and waited for him to continue.

"Don't you ever get tired of this chuck?" he asked, shortly.

"What's the use?" I answered.

He flung his hat across the room, his pipe on the oilcloth, and took up knife and fork. "I'll eat them or choke," he said.

When we stirred our second cups of coffee he burst out:

"I'm sick of this life, sick to death of it. Do you hear me? Eggs at home, and when I come here you have eggs. I wish all the hens on the green earth would die of fits or pip or some unholy disease. Green earth! See that prairie? Gray, and always gray; yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. And a thousand years from now. These plains have no heart in them, no pride. Why can't they grow green grass that is green, or green trees? Why

can't the sagebrush be green? I could eat green meadow grass, and I'd give my last dollar to see a tree budding into leaf. I remember the trees I used to climb when I was a kid. We had an old apple-tree in our back yard. I had to get a barrel or a chair to put my knee in the crotch to pull myself up. I never thought that tree was much to gaze at then, but I'd give something now to see it. When the blossoms came out it was like a big bouquet all pink and white, and when the wind blew the petals off it made you think of snow. I've worked in the lumber camps of British Columbia and Alberta, and seen the woods white and still. That's better than going to church. It gets nearer a man; least it does to me. I've been squirrel hunting in the beech woods down east, gotten up before the sun, and gone out when things were wet and smelly, and sat on a log for an hour without moving, and just listened to the wind rustling through the leaves and rubbing the branches together. That's the sweetest music I ever heard. But here, what does the wind do? It howls and yawls around your shack like a pack of coyotes. There's no gentleness to it, nothing soothing. It comes off the Pacific, hits the Rockies, and when it gets down, it's as pleasant as a broncho that doesn't know what

oats are. I hate it when it blows, and when it doesn't, I hate everything worse. The prairie gets too lonesome then. Seems like a kid you have slapped in the face that doesn't know what to do, or a dog in a crowd that is running around hunting for its boss. Sometimes I wonder what was the use of making these plains? Suppose they will grow wheat, what use is that if you break your heart working on the job? Did you ever stand on the street corner and watch the women go by? Some are like flowers; you never get tired watching them. Some put you in mind of the waves on the ocean, and some of race horses on the track, and some of the birds in the air: but the hags put you in mind of dry bones, and that's what this prairie does. There's nothing soft and pleasant and comfortable about it. There's nothing to tickle a man's fancy."

"Have some more eggs?"

"To hell with your eggs. I want some beefsteak, and oysters, and soft-shelled crabs, and mutton chops. Let's go to Winnipeg, you and me."

"What would we do in Winnipeg?"

"We'd eat what I said, and then we'd get drunk. Man, man, do you know what the lights and the music mean? Can't you see them now, long lines of lights, and carriages, and automobiles, and street

cars jumbling back and forth? Can't you see the shining pavements and the people crowding along, all talking and whistling, and the girls glancing back? Can't you hear the newsies calling the extras? And the music? Can't you hear it, beating and throbbing and pulling at your feelings, and whispering to you to drink, and eat, and laugh, and forget? Oh, God! For a night under the lights, I would—Yes, I'd hike for the lights and music, only the trouble is," and here the glow left Richard's cheeks, "I have no pangareen."

"Meaning money?"

"The same."

"And, so we homestead," I mused.

"Yes, we homestead; now, but not always." He strummed his fingers on the table. "I'd sure like to go on a tear with you."

The compliment behind his words was clear to me, but I merely smiled an acknowledgment.

"None of these dirty day and night Swift Current affairs," he went on, "when you count the two bits, and wake up in a livery barn, but Winnipeg or St. Paul, and nothing too smooth for a week. Sometime, eh?"

"Perhaps." I smiled, again.

"Want me to help wash the dishes? No? I

won't insist. Nothing I hate worse'n washing dishes. Every time I finish eating, I feel like dashing the whole outfit through the window. Wish I had some of those wooden plates they use at picnics. I'd enjoy sailing 'em through the air after each meal. You know, I feel better," he concluded, picking up his hat. "Got the venom out of my system. Come over and see me, and bring that tootling mouth organ of yours."

That afternon I chanced to see two men walk down the side of my breaking, slowly, dejectedly,—the slumped gait of men whose hold on hope is loosening. When they knocked, I pushed aside the letter I was writing, and bid them enter. One sat uneasily on the fuel box, the other relaxed into the rocking-chair. We talked of the various things that farmers do. The visitor with the patched coat and broken shoe strings and fringed trousers, knotted his hands over a knee, and spoke eloquently of his prosperous future: how much his crop on ten acres would bring him, what wonders a hot-bed would effect for his vegetables, the value of his land, when he became a freeholder, the certainty the present year of railroads building, what fools the people of his home town were for not taking his advice, and seeking a homestead. The man in

the rocking-chair nervously twisted his feet and fingered a felt hat. For conversation, he admired the weather and my house, and then, with an intake of breath, came to the object of their call. It was the matter of a loan of fifty dollars. The money was needed to relieve a pinch. He added the usual sureties of prompt payment: funds on the way from home, cash work promised by neighbors, the team of oxen to be sold when the breaking was finished, old debts to be collected. All familiar statements, their sincerity was not doubted, but I had no fifty dollars in my lean pocketbook, and presently the two men went out, unvexed, and shambled along the breaking, slowly and dejectedly as they had come. Did they ever, in any circumstance, walk otherwise, I wondered?

At dusk, I played the harmonica; the notes came untrue, and the chords lacked accustomed harmony, and soon I laid the instrument away with dissatisfaction. My eyes were reading the titles on the library shelf, when G. Wainwright Carter thrust his head within the door.

"Evenin'," he gave greeting. "Visitors welcome?"

"Always," I answered. "Come in."

"Can't stop. Have to get home. I don't take

no chances on the prairie after the sun goes down. Was lost once, and walked up and down all night to keep from freezin'. With one foot in a buffalo trail to keep from wanderin'. Got any kerosene? We're all out. I've been goin' to bed as soon as dark comes. It's too lonesome settin' 'round by myself. Dad went to town Wednesday for oil and grub. He ought to be back by now, but I reckon the booze has him. Last night when I seen your light on the hill, I thinks to myself, 'To-morrow evenin' I'll slip up there and borry some oil.' And here I am."

"Lights are lots of company," I said, producing the kerosene can. "Every night I look for yours and Hewes'. Those are the only ones I can see, but even two lights make the world smaller, and you know some one is living in it beside yourself. If I could make a wish that would come true, I'd wish for arc lights all over this prairie. Then we wouldn't have to wait for moonlight nights to visit our neighbors, after dark."

"It wouldn't be bad," he assented. "If I could make that sort of a wish, I wouldn't be here, at this end of the world. I'd wish to be in a cove I know on the Caroliny coast, where the fishin' is something to brag 'bout, and the sun is warm and the

wind soft. That's where I'd be. This prairie is too big: it gets on my nerves."

"Mine too," I confessed.

"Does it?" he exclaimed, delighted. "I never knowed if other folks felt the same way. Dad won't talk 'bout it. He drinks whisky when the feelin' gets him. It won't be so bad this summer when the clouds fill up the sky. They're sort of company, too. What do you do when you're all 'lone? If I haven't some work, I go plum batty. I set down and try to read, then I jump up and get a drink of water, then I set down again and take a smoke, then I spread a piece of bread, then I look at the picture album, then I take a chew, then I look out the window, and then I begin to cuss. That's enough oil. Thanks. It's gettin' dark, so I must be steppin'. You'll see my light to-night."

Next morning, Tom Triscott, on "Dynamite," halted before my door. "Hello, hello, hello! I say, old man, come go to Calgary."

"What's the excitement?"

"According to your inclination. We'll behave, or we'll jolly well take the jumps. This child is grievously bored with homesteading. His crop is all in, his labors are done for a space, and he pines

for some of the effete. Come along and see the moving-picture shows with him."

"You tempt me, Tom, you tempt me sorely. I've twenty acres, seeded to flax, and I feel wealthy, but to-morrow is Saturday, and Billy Hewes rides to Notre Dame—pardon, Notre Dame d'Auvergne —for the mail. We've been busy in these parts getting the crop planted; no time to go to the post-office. Three weeks without mail; that's scarcely civilized."

It was the mail, I think, that gave the prairie the advantage next day. All afternoon, calculating the number of letters I would receive, I kept an eye on the coulée for a sight of Billy returning. The world suddenly went large, and I was a speck lost in space. I remembered people to whom I seldom wrote, and hoped something extraordinary might have started their pens. I recalled persons to whom I never wrote, and wished that an excess of friendship might have explained itself on paper. The expressions of disrelish from enemies would be welcome! I recounted the business correspondence I had despatched, and the replies that might be expected. Perhaps the catalogue, summoned from a Winnipeg department store, would come; there would be stirring reading. It was time the editions of the

weekly newspaper, for which I had subscribed, began arriving. Two of them—at the worst, one—would furnish entertainment for the evening. The letters, of course, I would read at once, in order of the post-marked dates. If Billy came before dark—he surely would!—I could sit on the doorstep until ten o'clock, and scan them pell-mell at first, taking flash-light impressions of the contents, and quickly slipping the pages into their proper envelopes. Then I would shuffle the pile, extract a letter, and read it slowly, pausing to watch the afterglow, and building in my mind all I knew of the environment of the writer. Then I would repeat the performance.

Billy Hewes, leading his horse, came up from the coulée and crossed the fireguard.

"No mail," he said. "The mare went lame, and I had to return. It would make a man hate himself, wouldn't it?"

I swallowed the oaths that rose to my lips, and went in to start the fire for my solitary supper. That night I lay awake, as the others had done, and cursed myself for a fool.

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VII

I CLIMB THE HEIGHTS

THOSE who contentedly jog their emotions on the level road forfeit all the adventure of cross-country riding. I do not say their manner of going is not superior. If a placid eye and a pursed lip mark satisfaction, the thoroughfare traveler is satisfied, though his coat be whitened with the dust of the ruts, and his spirits weakened by cushions. It is something to move evenly, and have the sun always in view: the joy of monotony is not inconsiderable; at least a shadow of a pleasure adheres to winning through the days with no jarring over the unexpected, with no starts at the unknown or awakenings by the unusual. To be lulled into enduring tranquillity is one measure of a pleasant life's journey. The Lord pity the holders of that estate! cry the cross-country riders, in moments of exhilaration.

Certainly a man's spirits have mired in the slough of despond when the owner lies awake at night to

curse himself for a fool. To-day I can smile at the recollection, and pity the pilgrims on the common road. The weeks have passed, and the spectacle of summer progressing has lifted me from the mire, and set me on the heights. I think the rains of May and June lent aid to the ascent. The skies have not been clear; we have watched them anxiously, and the clouds, creeping black over the horizon, and the imprisoned thunder snarling have been omens we awaited. "Will it rain?" asked my neighbor, halting the plow, and casting up an eye. "Will it rain?" demanded his wife, standing the broom aside, and hastening to her door. That was our question. The settlers of last year have not forgotten the successive fair skies of that season, and their fields of grain calling without answer for moisture. If faith is needed in any affair, it is needed in farming. Whether we farm or not, we are all gamblers by compulsion, it appears to me. Whether we will or not, we must make our play and hold breath, while taciturn Fate deals the cards. The fearfulest may pluck at his sleeve, or the wiliest bait traps to catch his favor, but the game proceeds and it rains or shines, and we win or lose, without rhyme or reason. So it does often seem, but the minister of our community held otherwise.

There was church one Sunday at a house across the creek. The prairie folk rallied to sit on unplaned boards, laid from chair to chair. "Honor thy Lord," said the minister, "and He will surely recompense you." I, on my share of plank, thought of other sermons I had heard, of the doubts and proofs offered, the waverings and compromises, and could recall no such simple formula. The intellect of the surpliced clergy could not drive the bargain that did the faith of this farmer parson, who stood with unclenched hands among us. I looked upon these strong men and vigorous women, and wondered what intensity of belief possessed them. "Honor thy Lord, and He will surely recompense you," repeated the minister. Many of the hearers had staked everything on the crop that is in the ground; if it fails, they are ruined. And yet they made no sign while the bargain was offered, and I know not the secret takers there were or what bulwarks of character defended the courage of the unwilling. Outside existed the sunlit prairie, sweeping like the sea to the sky, and within sat we, who, with the rain, held the destiny of that land between us. It was a moment for faith: the prayer that followed was attended.

Rains came to do their work. Day after day,

the showers gathered and fell, and the grain under the nurture of sun and water shot into growth. There is going to be a crop! I have frequently picked up the statement—without an exclamation point—from newspapers, and I have never, heretofore, understood the fitness of my punctuation. In Saskatchewan, men plow the prairie and shoulder the burden of an over-long winter, railroads are flung down, towns are built, capital floods from the East,—all through hopes of a harvest. Four months must produce for twelve, or the province returns to a wilderness. There is going to be a crop! Thus, joyously, chant the optimists. The pessimists, in fear of frost and hail, admit no more than a probability. I am with the elated choristers. From my window, I may glance over my field of flax, a thick, even bed of green, whose counterpane is tinging into brown. It stirs to the wind, and the undulations pass and vanish at the edges, as do the movements on a pool into which a stone is tossed. I call the sight beautiful, and am never weary of the field. It has taught me much these past months. I was aware that they—the undiscernible, mysterious "they" who do so many wonderful things—made linseed oil from flax. That was a common fact; somebody must have told me or

I read it on a page. Since then, I have learned more. It is quickening to see the first sprouts venture through the soil. It is enlivening to watch them, when the stalks have reached the height of rippling under the breeze. It is delightful to behold the stand in bloom, comely, blue blossoms open to the morning sun, white butterflies in aimless drift across, and above, descending birds trilling roundelays. It goes to one's heart to detect the first yellow in the seed pods. These verities I learned without aid; they are not of first importance, but if hail comes before the binder, or if frost kills before those pods of seed are filled, I shall have the verities to remember.

"Your flax is coming fine," remarked Billy Hewes this morning, on his way to the spring. "Acts like you're to have a crop."

"Yes," I assented. "So it does."

"Ought to go twenty bushels to the acre, that patch."

"No, it should stay forever as it is."

"Then you wouldn't have a crop."

"But I would have that tapestry of yellow and green."

"You're a new kind of farmer," quoth Billy, and went his way.

I wish I might give you some adequate idea of this August the twelfth. Each summer day on the prairie, it is a whim of mine to believe, has its own distinctive flavor. You can sense this, if door and windows are open, when you first awake in the morning, and you know on the moment what tune, through the hours ahead, the out-of-doors orchestra will play to your thoughts. The day of wind and sunlight brings on a plague of restlessness; you crave the ends of the earth and unfamiliar companions: the day of chill and clouds induces melancholic misery, and the little demons of despair contrive to catch you unwary and weak: the day of unflinching rain locks you in your shack to ponder on the glees of domesticity: the day of shadows and blasts pricks your ambitions to cry for triumphs. To-day was none of these—a day of sheer sunshine, hot and unwavering, unstirred by a zephyr: a gentle day; one to inspire confidence in a bountiful harvest to come. So faint, it could scarce be detected, was that tang of sadness a dying summer must always give to us mortals. From an elevated station on my granary roof, where I labored with hammer and shingles, I could well see this day. Sunlight was the essence of it, sunlight downpouring from an unobstructed sky. The expanded land stretched un-

der the glow stark naked and warm. The shrill of insects, and the clatter of grasshoppers a-wing futilely scratched on the silence that closed me in; dry odors of grass and weeds and flowers arose to me; the sky fitted accurately over everything I saw. In truth, I was a prisoner, with no one to make conversation, but the confines were so large, grounds beyond them could not be imagined, and thus I was the master. With cheery thoughts I shingled the roof of the granary, the building that is to hold my crop. The hours passed with no more concern from me than from "Lady," my broncho mare, who grazed and asked no confounding questions.

I came to supper with weariness in my muscles, and hunger in my mouth. What mattered that? The reward of physical labor is swift and positive. You have not alone the running gratification, as the job progresses to your pleasure; you have the constant pleasant coöperation of mind and sinew, and another recompense the moment the tools are relinquished. It springs from fatigue of body, won in accomplishment; it is whetted by conceptions of cold water and soap and the evening meal; it culminates in the twilight on the doorstep. The man who has wrought lively with his hands eight hours sits down the more comfortably. To-day is pass-

ing, to-morrow blessedly has not come, and the hour of dusk is his. A pipe, and the step, and the setting sun suffice. And if there be wife and children, so much the better. The lassitude of his thews, easing after the food, conducts his thoughts into realms of drowsy fancy, and puts them away to rest. He does not desire to think, he does not desire to move: he becomes temperately intoxicated with peace. As you know, it is the man who thinks, that suffers.

A friend of mine holds toil and sweat of the brow a cheap price for supper and bed. If he will add a solitary hour between the two, I am wholly with him. The farmer understands this. If he does not, he has mistaken his calling. I find no better bargain with life for content.

"Yes, it is worth while to be alive," says our friend on the doorstep, as he knocks the ash from his pipe and goes in to sleep without dreams.

The last of the dishes were washed, when a knock came at the door. I glanced around to see a Royal Northwestern Mounted Police on the threshold. Very well groomed, he appeared, in red jacket, yellow-striped trousers, and polished boots. He saluted precisely, and I returned the courtesy, as best I could, and invited him into my home. Guy de Maupassant's *"Contes Choisis"* chanced to be on

the desk. He took the volume prisoner, and asked, flirting the leaves with experienced fingers, "Do you read this?"

"Sometimes," I answered, motioning to the rocking-chair. "Do you?"

He sighed happily, and settled himself. "Yes," he replied. "I read it. French is my mother-tongue. I was born in Paris. You have been there?"

I nodded, and he sighed again, happily, before continuing:

"To-day, I am fortunate. I stopped merely for a drink of water—do not move, sir, I can reach the pail—and I find a man who has been to Paris. Maupassant is marvelous, marvelous; he knew life, that man, and life is marvelous also."

"On the prairie?"

"Everywhere. I knew a man who lost seventy-five thousand francs at Monte Carlo one fine day—everything—all he had. He sat at the table, and bit his fingers till the blood ran down, and they gave him a ticket to Nice. But he did not go into the gardens and employ a revolver. No: he was not that kind, he discovered. He began again, and now he—ah, he writes me he is beginning to see how marvelous life is."

My evening hour had arrived when my guest swung upon his horse, and I reclined upon the step. In the west, the afterglow shaded from crimson at the line of sky and earth to palest lemon above. Abruptly, over the wide span of fading blue heavens, removed stars came into being. Smoky clouds of torn and disheveled design hung low in the north and were blotted out by the absorbent, advancing dark. The air lost its warmth of a sudden, and a trickish breeze, bringing coolness, larked up from the coulée. Without warning, in the east, the round, red disk of the full moon, huge as a cask, tiny as a thimble, was pushed into the sky. It mounted steadily, bearing an effulgence into the heavens that dissolved the stars and made of the world a flat, round platter with defined, up-turned rim. Paris and all other cities seemed far away.

I arose after a time and walked the path to the spring to my twenty acres of flax and stepped, carefully astride a row, into the field. The stalks were waving under the breeze as water plants, seen from above, move to invisible currents. Their tops were white in the moonlight, and the field developed dim and great. My shadow fell a league behind, and I became a giant, straddling through a forest, with knees among the treetops. The wind tweaked my

ears to have me leap off with it, and at length, out of sorts with so unresponsive a playfellow, departed alone. Consummate quiet succeeded. Degrees of stillness exist, I am told. The village street to the city dweller, the country lane to the villager, each has its lack of sound, but the silence of the windless prairie, to one who stops to listen, is a something that grows deafening. One must not halt too long: therefore, I gazed again over my field of flax. It would soon be ready to cut. My heart swelled. Twenty acres—all my own—by my own efforts. If pride in possession ever can be excused, will not the pride of the farmer, who holds his nose to the grindstone the year through, and never save at odd moments of sunset and sunrise and moonshine gives time to whimsies, will not that pride be pardoned?

When I turned to the house, the moon was high. The white light was evenly and thickly spread: it soaked into the ground, and the world appeared wet with it. The shingled granary bulked large and receptive in the corner of the fireguard. The business of transferring that field of flax to this building remained. Yonder was the harvest moon, I reflected; and then as the lamp expired, I added, "Oh, verily, I am no fool!"

VIII

I RECEIVE A LETTER

THERE is going to be a crop!

Over this prairie world of ours, under blue skies, through clear, sunshine-filled air, arises the chorus of expectation. One desires to spread the news broadcast—as though it were not already advertised: one wishes to thump persons upon the back, to grasp hands and to dance gleefully. It is difficult to go soberly about this business of farming. Hats invite to be thrown far, lips twitch to whistle, fingers itch to snap, heels to jig: horses step briskly, cattle frisk spiritedly, dogs bark joyously, birds sing rapturously, my harmonica peals triumphantly. We have played and won. Won? Not altogether: but the wheat fields have turned golden, the oats silvery, and the flax tawny, and the harvest is come. Do you hear the whirring clatter in the grain? That, my friend, is the song of the binder; some of us have waited a year for the music. We see coal in our bins this winter, flour in our cup-

boards, and hay in our animals' mangers. And next year? Spring is distant, but it will bring new barns, and fences, and painted houses, and more land black from the plow. To-day strangers have something to say beyond greetings; neighbors linger these evenings to chat long and cheerfully; the laughter of wives in the twilight increases. What is more to be desired than that?

There is going to be a railroad!

The newspapers assert the fact; the grade is building south of Swift Current,—you may behold the teams handling dirt; twelve miles from my section stake, a town-site has been located. What does it mean? Many things marvelous to relate. Stores, elevators, lumber yards, coal bunkers, a passenger station, a telegraph office, a letter box, trains and bells and steam, new people, excitement, life, a cluster of lights in the night,—a town one dozen miles away. We willingly forget the thirty-five miles to Swift Current. To town with a load of grain and return in time for supper! is our cry for our marketing.

Are these things wonderful? They seem so to me.

. . . . . .

I have said the settling of the Northwest plains makes romance that takes my breath. To-night,

when I know I must soon be gone, the prairie pleads for me to stay. Life here is unadulterated; the rewards and hurts are evident: it is not painful to live.

A final threshermen's meeting was held at Tom Triscott's house this evening in early September. The neighborhood growers of grain gathered to decide the last questions of threshing. I drove over with Billy Hewes and his wife. For some reason we three, who are generally merry together with the frank comradeship of men and women on the frontier, were silent. I was thinking of the past months and the changes I had seen wrought. Spring, summer, and autumn; seeding, growth, and harvest. The wonder of it! My twenty acres of flax lay in windrows on the ground. Soon the engine and separator would be working beside the granary. I also had played and won, and the triumph was sweet.

"Some wheat yonder," remarked Billy, as we drove along Triscott's field. "I bet that tickles Tom."

"Crops, crops," laughed Mrs. Hewes. "All I hear. Don't you men ever think of anything else? Why not talk about the sunset?"

"To-day is Saturday, madam," Billy replied. "I hope Tom went for the mail."

G. Wainwright Carter and Richard Brunswick stepped to the wagon wheel when we halted in the yard.

"He's been sayin'," began G. Wainwright, "that his oats are better'n mine. Now, I leave it to you all——"

"I refuse to listen," interrupted Mrs. Hewes, leaping down and running to the house.

We settled the argument and joined the group at the door.

"Here's a letter for you," said Tom Triscott, and then to the growers assembled, "Gentlemen, shall we begin the meeting? The question to decide is,—Do we want stook threshing or stack threshing?"

I broke open the envelope and read the enclosed page.

The cruel bluntness of words on paper!

INDIANA

THE GOAL

NATIVE HEATH

IT is something to be home again, to have about you familiar paraphernalia of life. This is my native heath and my pen leaps joyfully as it writes. "Are you glad to be back?" ask the neighbors, in plain phrase. "Yes, I am glad," is my reply, and there the answer halts. Some imp of reserve grips my tongue and words come not glibly. I am glad, so glad I tingle with joy, but for the life of me I cannot shout from the housetops. I can tell my gladness to trees, but not to people. If the neighbors could come to me singly, I would quietly explain to them. I trust they rightly interpret my taciturnity and fathom what I am unable to say. Among them are wanderers come home; *they* understand, I learn by their gazings into the distance the while we talk. The others, it may be, will never comprehend the mockery that lurks beyond the hills and the peace that walks in native heath. To know Athens, one must journey to Sparta, said the returned Athenian.

Native heath! It brings into my memory no bloom of heather or lines of hawthorn or clots of pines; it brings the woods and fields of Indiana, the country houses, the roads, bridges, rivers and creeks, cattle and horses, meadows, thickets, the sky, the sun, the wind, the rain, and the Earth—the soil that makes our bodies strong and our minds clear. I would gather it all into my arms and hold it close.

A man, I venture the assertion, has one birthplace and no more. He may come to love removed hills and plains, strange seas and alien mountains, but the aspects of his natal countryside remain in his heart, the flavor of his font always is on his tongue. The essence of my native heath is content.

I do not say the uneasy desires are dead; there has been no funeral over wanderlust. It is enough for me that I am home: the world beyond my home must wag as it may for the present; I have drawn on my slippers to sit by the fire. Nations shall rise and fall, wars shake the exchanges, panics spread, the world wear to an end, but I am not to be drawn forth. Here in Pleasant Township, Indiana, I shall work and play and make friends with those who cross my path. Old friends are the best, runs the saw. This house and this farm

and this countryside are as old friends as any I possess. I would not relish losing them. If, in my youth, the distances lured me, and I gaily tramped the vagrant's road to nowhere, I have no regrets to parade. There was fun in the march, and I beheld many things and learned several lessons. To-night, at least, I do not desire my youth restored to me. It has gone like the rainbow; it was glorious, radiant, but I cannot affect a pang for its vanishment. There remains the serenity of a clearer sky.

And there remains my native heath to which I have returned with a more disciplined appreciation, an enthusiasm more tempered, and a faith that is stronger. The country demands nothing; it gives all freely, inexhaustibly, and asks—I had almost again written, nothing. I think it asks one thing, and one only: that a man live up to the best that is in him. It matters not what is his creed, whether the text be long or short: so that the man attempts to live as he thinks, he will surely find friendship in the fields.

Best of all, he will have himself for a friend. Few men in cities, hotly struggling as they are for unrealities, have this friendship: few are acquainted with themselves. The colossal mockery

of it! To grasp so much and have such empty hands! I would not wish to go through life a stranger to myself, the worst and the best. This whole affair we call living would become so senseless. It is no trifle to maintain a constant cordiality: there is no more exacting neighbor than oneself. However, the silent country lends its aid.

II

THE FARM AND THE HOUSE

THIS farm is not mine. It belongs, they say, to my father: there are books in the court-house, three miles over the hills, that indubitably record the fact. These books are large,—so large the clerk must stretch his arms when he brings them of a nine o'clock from the vault; they are heavy,—so heavy the clerk staggers under a burden of two; they are solidly bound, one-quarter rich, red leather and shapely gold letters,—so solidly you could never doubt the truth of such volumes. You see, this Indiana farm is not mine. Why should I care to whom it belongs? The autumnal haze is mine, and the glories of the changing leaves, and the sunsets, and the early mornings when the farmer and I drive under the stars to the corn-fields to labor through the day. These things and more belong to me, and to you, and to any one.

This house is not mine. What matter? I shall call it my own. We have known each other for

long years, this reticent house and I. As a boy, I often sat on the stone steps (they were difficult to climb then: one assisted oneself by clutching a skirt or a trouser leg making the ascent), and looked across the fields to the thickets bordering the Mississinewa River; flat-footed, I galloped through the low-ceilinged living-room and into the kitchen with a floor of stone slabs and a wide, blackened fireplace where the beechwood flamed and crackled and the crane swung an odorous, bubbling pot over the heat that made dinner. As a boy, on tiptoe, I adventured into the south parlor, carpetless and curtainless in those days as now, the outside shutters closed, a must of the past in the air, a sense of desolation in the dusk. Upon the floor, in the center, bags of seed wheat and a trickle of kernels from a rent sack; upon the wrecked hearth, nothing. No andirons, no split wood; nothing save a film of gray ash. Once a parlor, this room was now a granary. My heart ran more easily when I closed the door and hastened into the sunlight. That room suffered, I was sure. It desired the guests of winter nights when apples were handed around, and the cider pitcher went bottoms up many times and the jokes that only the neighborhood was capable of understanding

cracked with the hickory nuts. Why could not the seed be stored in the barn with the hay and gear and machinery, I asked myself. The barn was staunch and spacious, of a benevolent look; certainly, it would take kindly to the guardianship. But farmer men in those days when I visited the country with the sun and made a point of returning to town with the night—there are so many formidable sounds in the dark on a farm!—seemed to me a dour, silent race of men, given to work and to food. I was fearful of putting the question, afraid they would not understand the feelings of an empty room.

To-night, at the table, I wondered how Farmer Joab might reply. The question was balanced on the tip of my tongue, when Martha, his wife, brought in another pan of her celebrated biscuits. "Please pass the syrup, Joab," was what I said.

This house stands back unobtrusively from the road. You glimpse it first, amid the attendant pine trees, when you swing down the point of the gravel hill and come by the lower pasture, where the grass is so long and green your horse cranes his neck and trots sideways. The roof is that gray of mingled, dimmed tones naught save a round of

summers and winters can give to any shingles; the gray of endurance, patience, and calm. The brick walls are the warm red that cheers and welcomes; the two white stone columns of the portico evidence the solid strength and grace of native, unfluted rock. Houses have each their character, their expressive air of consciousness, that comes not from the architect's pen and square, or from the materials of construction, or from the congruity of the scenery. I am convinced it grows with the life of the dweller. The man who built this house, and lived therein until he died, has left something of his personality. He was a friendly man, I think, for the house has for me the face of a friend. Through a long acquaintance it has tranquilly preserved its friendliness. The years have come and gone, and I with them, but the stamp of the builder to me still is present and unblurred. He wrought better than his times. Sixty years ago Indiana was not the pleasant garden of to-day. The log cabins and rail fences of the pioneer period are vanishing; the swamps are drained, the fields tilled, the encumbering timber cleared.—Alas! where are the walnut trees of yesterday?—Along the pikes are telephone poles, within the barns stand improved tools of intricate parts and diverse functions, auto-

mobiles pass the rural delivery postman; cement and silos, alfalfa and the markets of Chicago are discussed. Throughout this change, my friend the country house has remained unchanged. All save the south parlor; that is not as the builder planned.

III

ADOLPHUS E. SCHLECHTER

JOAB and I had returned from the field, and I was aloft in the mow forking down hay when his voice mounted the chute. "Some one to see you!"

"Coming," I answered, and dropped through the hole. "Who journeys to a Hoosier farm to see me?" was my thought in transit. "Oh!"

I had alighted before the traveler. He stepped aside as though the heavens had fallen, and the stalks of timothy he had been examining with the omniscient, proprietary air taken by examiners when they know nothing, fell from his relaxed fingers.

"O-ho!" said he.

"Not wishing to keep you waiting——"

"No harm done. My card."

He was plump as a dumpling, with a cherishing eye, and hands that rubbed themselves together. The pasteboard bore the name "Adolphus E. Schlechter," and the legend "Dealer in Precious Woods."

"Well, Mr. Schlechter——" I began.

"Do you smoke?" he asked, and offered a cigar.

"Thank you. Only after meals. Do you mind?" ("I shall give it to Joab," thought I. "His is a stronger constitution.")

Herr Schlechter poked me tenderly in the ribs, as one might a succulent porkling. "That is the time to smoke. We know, eh, what?"

"Indeed, yes," I answered, winking in turn and protecting my floating ribs where I most object to being poked.

"Have you heard the story——"

"Please wait a moment," I interrupted. "Joab!" I shouted. "Joab! Come hear the story!"

Joab is lean and lanky—"second growth hickory," he styles himself—with a pie-eating, Puritan cast of countenance, and a laugh that seldom escapes his mouth. He came from the corncrib with a measure under his arm, and fed the horses as he progressed along the runway.

"Now then," said I, when we were assembled.

Herr Schlechter told the story, and a surpassing story it was before Methuselah grew old. At the climax the narrator jogged me with his thumb; I

jogged Joab; and he, to complete the circuit, jogged Herr Schlechter. The raconteur's head was thrown back the better to accommodate his explosions of mirth, and Joab's jog took him up short, as the saying is. In truth, I believe his ribs never before had been violated.

"Eh, what?"

"'Spoofdiks'!" I quoted from the tale, and raked Joab's side.

"'Spoofdiks'!" he answered, solemnly, and projected a thumb.

It took Herr Schlechter up very short. "Peasants," he muttered, and then something in German we did not understand.

The ding-dong of Martha's dinner bell broke into our merriment.

"Let's go to the house," suggested Joab, becoming at once the hospitable host. "Will you eat a country meal with us, Mr. Schlechter? Afterward you two may talk."

Our guest smoothed out his forehead. Quite naturally his hands rubbed together and his fat lips pursed. "Country meal," he repeated. At the table he showed to superior advantage. Our artless questions soon set his tongue a-wag and it handled such uncouth names as Guinea, Borneo, and Luzon

with ease and rapidity. Innocent Martha was all excitement. Her eyes bulged like bugs' eyes.

"Do you mean to say," she demanded, "that you have really been in Borneo?"

"Yes, dear lady. I go every place where trees in quantities are."

"And are there trees in Borneo?"

"Yes, dear lady, many trees."

"And what else?"

He told us what else, and his talk went into the adventurous strain. ". . . I had to make the coast with my logs. The season drew to an end. When my natives—how do you say?—threw the job up, I wasted no word. I was the one white man in a hundred miles. I hit the leader here, under the chin, and my natives went to work and the logs moved."

"Are there precious woods in Indiana?" I asked.

"Your black walnut: unsurpassed for certain uses. We Germans know that." Herr Schlechter looked into his coffee cup as though it contained a jewel. "Would you care to sell those walnut trees behind the barn?" he gently inquired of me.

"I think they are not for sale," I answered.

"Prices on that wood are high at present," he continued, meditatively, as we arose from the table.

"The market varies." He rubbed his hands together. "Are you positive?"

"Positive." I glanced at Martha. She gave a sigh of relief and thanked me with a flash of eyes. Trees take the place of children to her.

Herr Schlechter walked to the window and back again. His hands did not rub together. "I do not blame you," he said, abruptly. "It is better to keep your trees. Money—ach! One can make money, but one cannot make trees so readily. Remember, I do not say this to every person. It is my business to buy and cut the best of the timber—one must live—but sometimes I feel like a murderer. Dear lady," he turned to Martha, "I understand. Believe me when I say so. I leave you your trees."

He kissed her hand, and was gone.

IV

A SUPERIOR PERSON

SHE was a superior person, I knew immediately. When her automobile halted in the road not far from where I shoveled corn into the crib of the cattle barn, I detected superiority in the blast of the horn by which my presence was summoned. There was evidence in the stiffness of the chauffeur's back; it was made manifest, when I approached, by the little lines about the lady's mouth.

"You live here?" she catechised.

I acknowledged that I did.

The lady thereupon spoke decisively, clipping her words as with a pair of shears. "I am interested in old furniture. Perhaps you have some you wish to sell. If you have, I shall examine the pieces."

My impression grew that she valued speech, and was not a squanderer on the unappreciative. "The furniture belongs to Martha," I replied. "It were best to ask her."

"And who is Martha?"

"The wife of Joab."

The lady plumbed my proletarian dullness with one contemptuous glance. "Shall we go to find Martha? You may ride,—in front."

Stiff Back reversed the car and we moved along the road to the house.

"You are the hired man?" she inquired.

The temptation was strong, and I yielded.

"Yes'm."

"Have you always lived on a farm?"

"Yes'm. I was born a farmer."

"Then you are a prodigy."

"Yes'm. I reckon."

"Are you never bored?"

"Bored? What is that, please?"

"Ennuyéd—weary."

"Oh, yes'm. At night. My feet hurt."

"You should go to an agricultural school and learn scientific farming."

"Yes'm. I'll ask Joab."

Stiff Back stopped before the stone posts of the yard wall and leaped out to assist the lady. I stood by for further orders.

"You may find the wife of Joab," she commanded me.

Martha, however, had seen our arrival, and now unhurriedly came down the walk. The two women scanned each other curiously: Martha, motherly, placid, winning, in blue dimity and blue and white checked apron; the other, slender, alert, hard, in luxurious motor coat. It was Martha who first spoke.

"Will you not come to the house?" she invited. "The air grows chilly in the late afternoon of these fall days. I have just started a fire."

The lady was pleased to acquiesce, and descended without the aid of Stiff Back. I tarried a moment to discover what sort of creature he was off duty (in the country we have time for such details) and finding him glum and hostile, I left him to sour alone and approached the woodshed. The idea had occurred for the filling of the woodbox to give opportunity for more of the collector of antique furniture. When I entered the living-room, she was scissoring orally:

"I am Mrs. ——," and she mentioned a name often seen in the newspapers. "I am building a new house at Indianapolis; a Colonial house; I desire to furnish it with genuine old furniture, preferably from the rural districts of my own state. You understand? Perhaps you have something that

would interest me. That rocking chair; a Shaker design, I believe?"

"My grandmother was a Shaker," replied Martha.

"The chair is genuine?"

"She brought it from Pennsylvania when she and her husband came over the Alleghanies with oxen. She rocked her babies in it, and so did my mother."

"How much would you ask for it?"

A flush crept into Martha's cheeks; the other was observing the tips of her calfskin boots, cocked on the polished stove fender, and failed to see. Dusk was coming in through the windows; I turned to light the lamp.

"Did you say how much?" inquired the lady.

"No, I did not say," answered Martha. "Why should I?"

A flush surged into the stranger's face. The two arose and the glow from the lamp fell strongly upon them: the one, the product of the city; the other, of the country. I do not know what thoughts whirled within their minds, or down what aisles into the past they looked as they stood thus, but after a moment the stranger's eyes filled, and she

laid a swift hand upon Martha's arm, and murmured, "Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive."

The lady spread her fingers to the fire and shivered slightly. "My grandmother also crossed the mountains behind oxen. One forgets, sometimes."

V

JOAB'S TUNE

THE house is large; the number of rooms runs into the teens, and there is no furnace in the basement. When frost begins to whiten the window panes of nights, Martha and Joab move down into their winter bedchamber that opens off the living-room. The good woman tells me privately the pilgrimage is because of Joab's rheumatism. His joints are not as supple as they were a few years ago, and though he was hard to convince, you will understand that climbing stairs in the cold is of no benefit. The good man has taken me aside to confide that the change is made for Martha. In summer the upper room nets any stirring breeze that relieves her touch of hay fever; in winter, the lower apartment is sheltered from the winds of the north, and Martha (whose joints are not as supple as they once were—you must say nothing to her, as she will never admit the fact) escapes the arctic journeys in the hall. As a consequence, I am left

alone on the second floor, a solitary pigeon in the roost; but I sit up with the owls, and so this pleases me. I may burn my oil, urge the fire in my stove, and read my books, and never disturb the sleeping pair below.

Of a Saturday evening, when the week's round of work is completed, Joab brings his corncob pipe and farmer's journal, and ascends with me to my room. The lamp is trimmed so there is not a suspicion of a flicker, and stationed like a lighthouse in the geometric center of the table; a chair is on either side; and the stove, between the two of us, agreeably toasts our shins. If Joab has been to town, he will sigh before filling his pipe and opening his paper; if he has remained at home, he will whistle a little air before he unties the strings of his tobacco pouch, and then I know we are going to make a night of it. Presently, Martha will come with a bowl of doughnuts and a bottle of elderberry wine, and remark, before she sits in the armchair drawn close to the fire, how thick the smoke is. And it will be all of ten o'clock before she notices how late the hour has grown. Then they will bid me good-night after she has made sure I have plenty of covers on my bed, and they will creak softly downstairs, on tiptoe, as though I were already

asleep and they feared they might awaken me.

"Joab," I ask this evening, "what is the name of that tune?"

With a forefinger he tamps the brown tobacco: he pauses to rub a thumb across the six days' stubble on his chin. A rasping is produced, as though sandpaper were stroked, and since Joab may make this music only when Martha is out of hearing, he applies the other thumb before striking the match.

"Puff! puff!—I reckon—puff! puff!—that is my version—puff!—of 'Home, Sweet Home.'"

Joab, you cannot cozen me. There is philosophy behind those puffs, I know; I am silent and pretend to adjust the flame of the lamp, as though I would start my reading.

"When I was a lad," he begins, "I saw visions and heard voices, like every other lad. We lived in a log house on the Wabash and ate cornbread, and I vowed a mighty vow I would never become a farmer. Indiana, in those days, did not seem big enough for me. Sometimes I thought I was born to be a cowboy, and I could see myself with a gun on my hip and spurs on my heels, riding fence or herding cattle or busting bronchoes, or—this is betwixt you and me and the bedpost and must go no

farther—ramping through town twirling my trusty gun and puncturing lights. And sometimes I thought I could see myself a red-shirted miner, searching the mountains in the big stillness and panning out the gold. Sometimes I was on the seas, a barefooted sailor, clinging to wet ropes, rocking in the crosstrees, spinning the wheel with the wind and spray across my face. Sometimes I was an explorer, hacking through the jungles or plodding the desert or jamming the ice or floating down unnamed rivers. Sometimes I was a soldier marching under the sky, tenting beneath the walls, looting the fallen city. Sometimes I was a scout, peering across the plains, trailing the redskins, warning the settlements. Sometimes I was a timber cruiser, or express coach driver, or the Governor of Indiana, or the President of the United States. Oh, I was everything. Well, well!" A thumb went scratch, scratch across his chin, and puff, puff went the pipe. "I've always been a Hoosier farmer. I'm happy to be what I am, and happy to be where I am. That's what my little, old tune means."

Martha entered with doughnuts and elderberry wine. "My! How thick the smoke is!" she exclaimed. "What are you men talking about tonight? How to save the country?"

"No, child," answered Joab, "we were deciding that Indiana is the best place on earth."

"Of course it is. Have you two been all this time deciding that? Men *are* stupid!"

VI

NO BLOT ON THE SCUTCHEON

A HARD driven autumn rain found and utilized the leak in the kitchen roof; water soaked the ceiling, the plaster buckled and threatened downfall, and Martha, pausing often to look overhead, repeated many times, "This will never do."

On the morrow came Henry Williams, premier carpenter of Noiram, with fragrant, new shingles and shining new nails. (Have I told you Noiram is our town three miles over the hills?) He arrived with no helpers, as is the privilege of carpenters and allied craftsmen; and in time for dinner, as is the habit of those who visit the country. That afternoon Joab went to the cornfield alone.

Henry is grizzled and bustling and talkative. A dearth of subjects will become a subject to his tongue. He has a mind for the prodigious, the uncommon, the romantic. A builder of fantastic air castles; they grow and topple like structures of cards, and naught dismayed, he turns to untried

foundations. As we leaned the ladder against the roof, he remarked, "There's a story about this farm."

"So? What is it?"

"Folks say there used to be an underground passage somewhere, long and dark, and you walked in fresh earth. A hidden door, too, double-locked, and hinges that never squeaked. It was in the days after the war when this house was a road tavern, and candles burned all night on the card tables. Lively times, then; gold, and liquor, and gambling. Indians standing 'round; men coming and going. Strange sights this house has seen." Henry wagged his head with an actor's instinct, and threw a glance over his shoulder. Probably at this point in their old wives' tales, his ancestors crossed themselves.

I braced the ladder for Henry to ascend, and inquired, "Why did they have an underground passage?"

"Why? Because they murdered folks here. Dead men tell no tales, but their horses will. Ask them who know how many horses went south at night over the Ohio River. Now, then, up with the shingles."

"It is hard to believe," I objected. "The house has so friendly an appearance."

"Can't tell by appearances."

"I would wager no murder was ever done here."

"There's a stain of blood on the floor of one of the rooms to prove it."

"Nonsense, Henry. Which room?"

"Parlor, maybe," he replied, a bit testily. "That's where they generally murder 'em, ain't it?"

An hour later we walked through the lower hall to mount the stairs to gain the ridge of the faulty roof. The door of the south parlor stood an inch ajar, and Henry, who has never applied arnica to his bump of inquisitiveness, promptly injected his head.

"Hum, what's this?"

"The south parlor. It hasn't been occupied for years."

With the shutters closed, the room was dim, in half-light save where the sunshine pierced the lattice chinks and struck the floor like arrows. The shock seemed to have stirred the dust, for the arrows of light danced with motes. An odd ballroom! Nothing else moved. The smell of the past lodged in the still air; a trickle of wheat from a torn sack had stopped as though the walls frowned upon its escapade; shadows adhered to the corners;

no flames played on the hearth; the window panes were blind. I winced when Henry strode across the floor and flung back a shutter. It was like tearing a bandage from a wound, to admit brusquely the full day to this wretchedness.

"Parlor, eh?" he asked. "Appears to be a granary. Not a bad room: large, plenty of windows, open fireplace, tight floor, ought to be used—what's this?" Quick as a cat on a mouse, he was on hands and knees over a blot on the bare boards. "Blood! Now will you believe me?"

"No, not blood," interposed Martha, who providentially stood in the doorway. "That is where machine oil was spilled last spring. Believe what, if you please?"

"That this house was a road tavern," I cried. "That there existed an underground passage with fresh earth, and non-squeaky hinges, that men were done to death here and Indians blew out the candles." I pointed an accusing finger at Henry. "Yon fellow is a miscreant, a worker of iniquity. Call shame upon him! He would have us entertain dark notions, he seeks to destroy our faith in a friend. Why was the whipping-post abolished?"

Unwithered, Henry arose to his feet and opened

a second shutter. His eye roved the room speculatively: he was designing another air castle.

"Perhaps he means the empty Quinder house across the river," said Martha. "I have heard things——"

"Maybe it was the Quinder house," Henry admitted, ignoring me altogether. "Anyway it happened a long time ago." He rapped with a knuckle on one of the presses that fill the nooks on either side the hearth. "Solid stuff there." He pulled forth a drawer and continued his tappings, with interruptions to listen. "Now, I wonder, if there are any secret compartments in this?"

I gave no heed: I was too happy in being sure there was no blot on the scutcheon of the house I loved. Martha smiled and went down the hall and into the yard to feed her chickens.

VII

MITHOCTOBER—NO, OCTOBER

I WAS splitting kindling in the woodshed when we became acquainted.

"Pleath, thir."

The voice ascended from the ground; I glanced over my shoulder prepared to see a Dormouse or a White Rabbit. I saw her standing on the threshold.

"Pleath, thir."

"Hello! Little Miss What's Your Name?"

"My name ith October."

"Is that why you come bringing garlands of leaves?"

She looked me deep in the eyes for some moments, her own blue orbs mirroring thoughts as pools do clouds; then she flung back her brown hair and smiled. . . . The mischief was done: I fell in love at once.

"I don't know, I juth come. Do you live here, pleath?"

"Yes, Miss October."

"My name ith October, not Mithoctober."

"Yes, October, and it please you."

"What pleath me?"

"My living here."

"Oh, I don't care. Thumbody hath to live here. You thee, I went down the road for a long, long way, I did, an' I went by your houth, an' I zink, 'That ith a nith houth,' an' I came up the walk, I did, an' I peeked in the door, an' I thaw you thoppin' wood, an' goin' 'O-o-f! O-o-f!' every time you thopped. Then I thaid, 'Pleath, thir.'"

It was time to catch a breath; October sat her diminutive self upon a box and placed the wreath of autumn-tinted leaves upon her head. (I was now desperately in love.)

"You ith a funny man," she remarked. "But you ithn't ath funny ath you zink you ith."

Embarrassed, I laid aside the axe and sat upon another box.

"Aren't you goin' to thop thum more? I like to hear you go 'O-o-f! O-o-f!'"

"No, I am going to talk to you."

"That ith nith. You can tell me a th-tory."

"No, you can tell me one."

She cupped her chin in a palm and squared her

toes. I shall omit the lisping because it is such a bother to write, and retell the tale as it was told to me while I watched the dimple twinkle in October's cheek.

"Once there was two little girls. They lived in a big house with lots of other little girls. An' boys. One was good an' one was bad, but nobody could tell them apart. Mostly. 'Cause they both wore the same dresses an' slept in the same bed an' had the same name. They did. One day they weren't to go outside the yard, so they went to the gate an' looked out. An' one little girl said, 'Let's just go a tiny piece.' An' the other little girl said, 'No, I shall stay here.' So she stayed. The other little girl walked down the road an' nobody saw her. But she saw lots of things. Some cows that looked at her an' looked hungry, too. So she walked fast an' didn't say anything. An' a man in a buggy who said, 'Whoa! Fine day, isn't it?' An' she said, 'Yes, sir.' An' he said, 'Whoa, there. Can't you stand still?' He said that to his horse, 'cause I—no, I mean the little girl—*was* standin' still an' the horse *wasn't*. Then he said, 'Do you want to ride?' An' I—no, I mean the little girl—she said, 'I'm just goin' a tiny piece. Thank you.' An' then he said, 'Good-by. Get up, cluck, cluck,'

an' pretty soon he was gone so far she couldn't see him. An' then she came to a place where some leaves were runnin' along the ground 'cause the wind was after them. She did. An' the leaves said, 'Oh, see the bad little girl! She ran away again. She ran away again. Oh, see the bad little girl!' An' she said, 'I'm not a bad little girl. I just came to see how pretty everything is.' 'Cause how can anybody be bad when anybody goes a tiny piece to see how pretty everything is?—Oh!"

In the doorway was a determined young female, spindle-shanked, freckle-nosed, strident-voiced with authority.

"Here, you Tilly. You'll ketch it for runnin' away again. You're a bad little girl."

"Her name is October," I said.

"It isn't either, Mister. Her name is Tilly, and she's an orphan, same as me, and she lives in the Orphans' Home up the road, and I have to take care of her."

"Thumtime my name ith October, it ith."

"Yes, and sometimes it's January, and sometimes it's April. Whatever name is on the calendar, Mister, that's her name, she says. Come along, Tilly."

"I wath comin' by mythelf pretty thoon. I didn't run away, I walked away, I did."

When I jingled my pocket and stepped aside, Freckle Nose promptly followed.

"You are a nice person," I said. "And here is twenty-five cents. Will you see that October isn't—er,—spanked?"

"You bet I will, Mister."

"Pleath, thir. Do you zink I'm a bad girl?"

What could I say? I said nothing. I pretended not to hear and returned to splitting kindling.

VIII

WHAT HE THOUGHT

THIS is an ordered farm. With nightfall the cows come to the barn, the pigeons go to the mow, the chickens to their roost, the pigs to their straw, the sun sets, the stars appear, Martha lights her lamp, Joab remarks it is growing dark, I agree, and we bring our creaking loads of corn from the field. By nine o'clock, when the fire in the living-room has burned low and I climb the stairs to read alone, I seem to be its sole stirring resident. A hush is everywhere. In my corner of the house there is no sound of daytime, no voice of the working world; I hear nothing save faint resonances, those shadows of noises that fall around one during the late hours.—Perhaps the old house breathes.—Without, the black branches of the orchard trees on the slope twist among the stars, the meadow swells dark against the sky; the road is a print of dust on velvet, the trunks of the sugar grove are stretched upward from the chill of the earth.

Nothing moves. The wind, like a staid fellow, has gone to bed somewhere, and I turn from the window and contentedly prepare to follow his example.—But he does not stay in bed. To-night he is a roisterer. He taps at the pane, and awakens me; he disturbs the peace, hallooing around the eaves, whistling down the chimney, shouting in the trees. No use of endeavoring to sleep: he has captured my attention and I must listen.

He is telling now of yesterdays, of forgotten songs and laughter, of the long, warm hours of summers, the comradeships of winters, of hands that were firm and lips that were red—Avaunt, Wind, and leave a countryman to rest.

He will not. He chuckles the louder, and sets up his canvases. A splash of afterglow between the hills, a flood of moonlight across a valley, a ruffle of white mountains above lakes, dim sweeps of woods and fields,—I remember them all, those vignettes in the book of memory. Be off with you, Wind.

Still he will not go. He chortles and works with bright crayons. Ah, those pictures! I know them. They are the dreams of my youth, vivid, absurd. I would laugh over them were my eyes not blurred with tears. They are so artless. And then I see

they are beautiful. Here is one: a sea of rushing waves, a brig heading to Treasure Island.—Here is another: a waste of ice and a hunter's hut.—But where is the faith that sailed across uncharted water, and the courage that built in the solitude? We may well ask ourselves, we who dreamed brave dreams.

. . . . . .

Joab is a better man at shucking than I. It is he who keeps an ear of corn in flight all the time, and heaps his wagon before my load has reached the throw-boards. Then his horses are hitched to a fence post and he comes to my assistance. Three rows to my pair he handles, with an apology for his dexterity. "You see, I was shucking corn before you were out of the cradle."

This morning we work together in a silence of words for the half of an hour. There is the attenuated din of the field—the intimate rustling of the dry leaves, and the smothered crash of stalks under the wheels—and Joab is humming that tune of his own and fast demolishing his cotton gloves. It would pain him did we not have full cargoes by dinner time. My mind is divided between the events of the night and the manipulations of my hands. One, grasp the ear; two, rip the husk;

three, break the stem; four, toss into the wagon. Repeat.

"So you are happy to be what you are and where you are?" I ask of a sudden.

His thoughts are woolgathering; he pauses a moment to bring them back. Then his shrewd, gray eyes lighten with comprehension.

"I am. Are you?"

"Not so fast," I retort. "Did you hear the wind last night?"

"Yep. I couldn't sleep."

"What was the trouble?"

His eyes are twinkling now, and I know that in some concealed region he is laughing.

"You were thinking——" I suggest.

"Of that broken gate in the pasture."

"Of the dreams of your youth. And wondering——"

"Where we can find some hinges——"

"Why they didn't all come true. You were looking——"

"For a new hasp."

"For the old glamour."

"Yes?"

"What shall we do when the zest for life departs?"

"What shall we do?" he repeated. "Why should it ever depart? Dreams are made of cobwebs and youth is a fever. If a man will but open his eyes, the zest for life will never depart. Take beauty, for instance. They tell me there is no beauty hereabouts. I say there is more beauty in this very cornfield than was ever caught by words, or music, or paint. Same with everything else. If a man will but open his eyes.—That is what I was thinking last night."

IX

A RAINY DAY

WE owe much to rain. No more sociable company of strangers collects than one a sprinkle compels to chance shelter. The travelers of the inn fall to telling stories, the pedestrians under the archway manufacture jokes. The wet is a common enemy and those who outwit it have the joint satisfaction of victory. Summer showers effect this to a degree, but the cordiality is evanescent, a froth soon to be absorbed when the refugees disperse. Give a dash of chill and a prolonged downpour—an autumn rain, in a word,—and the victorious relate family history. I have seen the most crabbed town dunder-pate, basking behind the stove, glow with content when an unfortunate entered, streaming and stamping, and I have beheld those rustic scowlers, from whom beneath clear skies you could not get a grunt, turn cheerful in their place of vantage and request a match or express an unsolicited opinion on the weather.

Ever and anon, that is to say—if you do not understand the classics—occasionally, but not too frequently, I relish a rainy day. It is salt in the dish, an appetizer for sunshine, a seasoning of domesticity. Without it some of us would forever be shifting vagrants professing allegiance to no roof. A day of persistent, cold, determined rain, I mean; a rain we country folk call "wet," driven aslant by gusts of wind, dropping from a sky of solid drab, battering the windows, hammering the shingles, whipping to cover even the doughty Joab. There is something blithe (when one is housed and snug) in the drip of water from the eaves, the spatterings on the panes, the trickle intruding under the door, the sizzling in the chimney, the rills in the ruts, the pools in the fields. Master World receives a ducking, but we are dry!

No corn husking to-day. The morning foray to the woodshed, the sally to the barn, the expedition to the feedlot, enhance the haven of the hearthstone.

There are so many things to do, and so many thoughts to think, on a rainy afternoon. I give to Joab the things to do (always he has odd jobs laid by for emergencies: at dinner he spoke of grinding an ax) and leave to myself the thoughts to think.

An equitable and practical division of labor. The farm is drenched and shivering; I am warm and dry. A superior time for thinking—but I have no thoughts. Who cares to think when it rains? Not I. Far better to sit in the chimney corner and beg industrious Martha, who believes the floor needs scrubbing, to tell where the doughnuts are hidden.

I do not desire—as I have heard testy persons exclaim—to live in a land of no wet. A plethora of sunshine would be bad as a glut of gold. One would grow too much the master of his destinies; puffed with conceit, insufferable to another, falling to blows. How perpetual sunlight might affect the domestic animals! No longer would they acknowledge our sovereignty. The horse would not whinny at the pasture bars for admittance to the barn yesterday he despised; the dog would not relinquish the step he claimed last night for his own territory; the cat—most superior of beasts—would not scratch at the door. As for the wild creatures, it is beyond imagination what airs they would assume. The rain administers humility.

A blue sky by all means for prospecting the future: a gray sky for examining the past. I do not know the reason, but it does appear that Memory is wooed the more willingly while the heavens

weep. In the sun she is pale and uncommunicative; then Ambition, a restless jade, has you by the sleeve, plucking you forever forward and eternally slamming doors behind. It is not the least of my pleasures to walk (while Ambition bites her fingernails) with wan, smiling Memory and open again these doors.

Smoking! Do not question the votary of cigars that must puff on the street like an engine on the track, as though he also labored, a slave of time: do not inquire of the flourisher of the cigarette case (who is concerned with vanities and not with standard enjoyments) when is the time for best smoking; go to the lover of the briarwood dreaming beside the fireplace and ask.—My dear, sir, when it rains.

And reading. It is not the nibbler in the public library, running to and fro like a giddy boy in a sweetmeat shop, who knows: not the shriveled bookworm, to whom all weathers are as nothings: not the collector of rare volumes, a pest that buzzes and alights only when a dealer spreads honey: not the purchaser of shelves who orders by the ton and consumes by the ounce: none of these, it is the reader for solace who knows. Approach him.—The same answer; when it rains.

For the eating of doughnuts. Never disturb the whining epicure.—If you come to me, I say, when it rains.

To-morrow the sun will shine and we shall go afield; to-day it rains and we linger indoors. Sing ho! for an occasional day of rain.

X

ON BEING A BACHELOR

THE dwellers of this countryside know me well. My life is an open book to them. In days gone I have loved and quarreled with their daughters, I have played and warred with their sons, with those who now have sons and daughters. Auld lang syne avails me nothing. I have never stolen a horse or blown a safe. They are aware of this—they would be surprised were I sent to prison to-morrow—and yet they view me askance. Things are said behind my back, hints are dropped at my feet, innuendoes dart about me; I hear whisperings and see winks. There is something amiss with me.—I am a bachelor.

Do not, I pray you, toss this off with a smile. If you, reader, have entered into wedlock, tarry with me a moment and let your experience point out where I go astray. If you are as I, despised, an outcast, withholden from former comradeships, put aside with quips, valued as junk, frowned upon,

trodden underfoot, silenced, rubbed the wrong way,—if you are a bachelor, come and we shall unite our sympathies and candidly examine this injustice.

I am—years old. That age, you understand, when discrimination begins to grow pinfeathers. I have no illusions about myself. In all probability I shall never garner a million dollars: the odds are against my becoming a renowned savant, painter, lawyer, chemist, divine—I would prolong the list, but patience revolts before the task.—You may complete it at your leisure.—It is not certain I would make a worthy husband. Yet how am I shoved toward that estate!

Even in the home of my family yonder at Noiram what awkward gaps in the table talk, what withdrawings from lines of thought, what snatchings of fingers from topics, what signposts erected on the road of duty, what morals drawn, what sugar-coated directions given, what tweaks administered! I have broken by accident upon a private council and sent them all scurrying with guilt-stamped faces from their conversation. It was I they discussed. Well! I flatter myself I bear me nobly through these trials. They shall never know how I am harassed. My countenance shall be serene.

This concern for me spreads beyond the inner family circle and works damage. I have an aunt; I admire and respect her: she has hearkened to my tale of inconsistencies and never complained. Last summer she wrote me a charming letter; I replied in my politest manner, but (I think) because I neglected response to a wee question wedged between two paragraphs,—"How go the affairs of your heart?"—she never since has written me. It was an oversight; I would gladly tell her how they go. They go very badly, they go not at all. How can I write and explain without betraying myself into the camp of my adversaries? I have another aunt; once we were boon companions, we made merry together, she defended my frailties, spoke well of me a long time, but at length (I think) because I am not as she—married—came silence. I have cousins and uncles and more aunts. They consider me with disapprobation. I am a slur on the record, a black sheep in the flock.

My amiable friends never asked my consent when they married. Why should they concern themselves about me? Because I am a farmer, I do not hector them to embrace agriculture. Yet because they are man and wife, they conjure me to join their condition. I am willing to blink like

an owl the while they coo, I am ready to pass an opinion upon their offspring, calling the gods to witness what an extraordinary creature it is, I suffer myself to be thrust suddenly from their discourse, to be permitted to twiddle my thumbs in a corner when they review a subject "no bachelor can understand." Nay, I will not longer with magnanimity allow this last to go unchallenged. A recipe is a recipe, lingerie is lingerie, a baby is a baby, and I maintain a bachelor, if he sets his mind to it, can comprehend any one of them.

I will not have the joy of life wrenched from me. You have leaped into the fire with no urging on my part, friends and enemies; it is for you to prove your estate is better than mine in the frying-pan. The burden lies with you. I say nothing; I await your arguments. I do, however, bristle against the high-handed, dogmatic, intolerant assurance that makes a bachelor fair game, an oddity, something to draw the finger of shame; to be seated below the salt, to conspire against, to render uneasy and suspicious, to snub, to wheedle, to pity, to correct. Your lot may be a happy one. I hope as much. You have my best wishes. But do not, I pray you, take it so calmly for granted that mine is miserable. Oh, do not shout your superiorities

into my wearied ear. Rather, if you will advance no quiet proofs, let my eyes distinguish them so that I may be led insensibly to your way of thinking.

These violent advocates! Do they never write marriage for life and ask as Elia asks of

"Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fireside conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*—do these things go out with life?"

XI

THE TOWN OF NOIRAM

I AM sure I have told you nothing of our town of Noiram save that it lies three miles over the hills. Perhaps other towns do the same from other farms. I have never noticed. At any rate, there the resemblance halts. Noiram is cast in a different mold, without a parallel, unique, unmatched, first and last. It is the town of my birth.

Is Noiram conscious, does it appreciate——? Hoity-toity! You ask?—Come with me, unbeliever. —What do you desire to see? Acclaiming multitudes, bunting, epaulettes, keys and seals, triumphal arches, genuflexions?—I warrant you none of that frippery.—You shall see—yes, man, remove your hat,—you shall see——

A hitch rack. You open your mouth to say something? Out with it! You will not, you cannot, you know not what to say? A hitch rack around a courthouse takes away your breath? Dullard, dullard, must I explain? And I thought—never mind what I thought.

This is the mart of Noiram, the bourse, the public square. Here flanking the dignified courthouse, surmounted with a dome and a figure, range on four sides the shops and bazaars, the banks and offices. Here we barter and trade; here traffic is thickest, trucks rattle, street-cars turn the downtown loop, automobiles cut corners, pedestrians are in a hurry; here the heart of commerce beats.

Come with me again. I could show you churches, and asphalt streets, residences, a new stone post-office, a public library, and all the appointments of prosperity. The people are proud of their small city, and with reason. I, also, am proud of it. To-day, however, if you would see Noiram's ornaments, you must find another guide. We are bound for a sentimental journey. If you are one who frowns on sentiment (you would call it sentimentality, wouldn't you?) or if you have a hard head for figures and facts, it were better for both of us that you do not come.

Years ago there lived in Noiram a boy—just a boy like unto thousands of other boys. In winter he wore shoes and stockings; in summer he went barefoot. He brushed his hair under compulsion. He threw stones, I understand, and bound rags

about his bruised fingers, and whooped, and had a prejudice against learning. No doubt he was very disagreeable. The remarkable part was that he, like the thousands of other boys scattered over the land, never cared a rap. Public opinion did not scathe him. When he thought of it at all, he laughed to himself in thinking what stupids the grown people were. He was up with the birds to start the adventures of the day; he was late to bed for fear the world, a jolly, fine world it was, might vanish during the night. When I say world, you understand I mean Noiram and the circle of hills drawn around. He did not much concern himself with what was beyond; he had not the time. His kingdom was inexhaustible. Day after day he ran with Romance and Enthusiasm and other companions; the days were always too short and there was not enough of them for doing the things that simply had to be done. He wanted to remain forever a boy, but the people decreed otherwise. And then one day the boy disappeared. There was no excitement, no searching parties organized, no rewards offered. The inhabitants of Noiram considered it a matter of course that the boy should disappear. They very kindly made room among themselves for the youth who took his place,

and the sun rose and set as before. The boy was never again seen.

He is somewhere in Noiram, I know. Often I seem to hear the echo of his whistle in the streets; often I think I hear his voice at play. I am the only one who appears to miss him, and miss him cruelly at times I do. Without success I have ransacked his old haunts. Yonder is the schoolhouse he graced with perspiring brow and rebellious thought. I knew him well; he would not be there after four o'clock. Better to hunt up and down the river, where he passed whole days watching the bobber on the current, worming through the thickets, executing the high dive, camping with fire and tin cans. Better to seek the lumber yard where he rummaged for building material, or the field where he rode curvetting sheep, or the street corners where he shot marbles and spun tops, or the back yards where he——

I saw that yawn! You do not care to come with me? Perhaps you search through your Noiram for another boy?—Yes, there is the hitch rack. When I drive in from the country I may tie on the public square and look aloft at the high dome of the courthouse and the figure atop. Bless me! I forgot to say that the figure is Justice with balanced scales

held in one hand. They give me welcome a king might envy to the heart of the city, these townspeople, but they made me grow up to a man and they made Noiram grow up to a city, and (though I love thee, Noiram, in thy present state) sometimes, methinks, the scales of Justice should be tilted ever so little when I walk below.

XII

NOT MY FAULT

OF late I have been re-reading a book which tells you how to use spare time. Mr. Author puts a question squarely at the reader. He singles you out as the pedagogue does the offending scholar, he levels a ferule, and sternly demands, "What are *you* doing with it?"

I confess I was nonplussed. I felt guilty, caught with the sun up, my fingers in the jam pot, late for dinner, my lesson unlearned, and my longing was to squirm away. I was not prepared to answer—even to myself—and I rejoiced, after making certain, that the author was not present with ferule before me.

What am I doing with spare time? I am not doing anything. I desire not to do anything. It is true a credit of time has been granted me at the bank; I may use it as I please, draw large or small sums, present no pass-book, never bother with identification. My checks are always accepted. It is

true I keep no account of the spending of the pennies.

"You, sir," remarks the author, "waste time."

"Precisely," I answer. "And you, sir, are a miser."

"One moment and I shall convince you——" But I close the book and silence him. Try as I will, I cannot unite with these disturbers who shout there is no virtue in idling. The tom-toms beat, the recruits muster, I feel the zealot's ardor, I behold with kindled eye all the pomp and panoply; the column approaches, I have a mind to join.—The column passes; set faces, waving banners, determination. I wish it luck.—So many crusades have gone down to the sea.—Somehow, I never enlist.

This is not my fault. When one is born a constitutional idler,—if I may so express my temperament; when one takes a deliberate delight in day dreaming, in mental pottering,—*deliberate* delight, I repeat; when one labors the more diligently to earn more leisure for vagaries, how can one, without a blush, swell the slogan, "Improve, improve, improve"? Is it not wiser to remain unblushing and a bad example for benefit of the army? Some one must be an anti-type.

The leaders would have their soldiers continually alert to spring upon some new bit of wisdom (perhaps two thousand years old) or scouting into sparsely settled realms of knowledge where the climate isn't at all agreeable, or ceaselessly polishing their minds as though they were sidearms. The generals plan to capture the fortified adage, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Let them! They must do without assistance from me. I have no wish to make my mind a tiger, or a scout, or a sword. It is my companion, and I endeavor to treat it with respect. I have my work, and then my mind is a partner; when we are done, I prefer to have finished. If I go for a walk, it may come, and welcome, and solemnly tread beside me, or amuse me with chatter, or run about and pick flowers. Or it may stay at home.

All that these disturbers say is probably true for the unconfirmed idler, a restless creature, who must be always on tiptoe, who has no ear for solitude, and who immediately wonders, when he possesses an idle moment, what to do with such a thing. "Utilize it!" clamor the leaders. "Improve yourself." Before such a chorus, I raise my voice with trepidation. They would never understand the two

words, "profitable idleness." They would never accept an "Apology for Idlers."

It is well the world does not know how many spare minutes befall the farmer. What improvements could be wrought in him! What a time-table executed! In going to milk in the morning, let the rustic instead of filling his lungs with the clean air of dawn, meditate on a page of Marcus Aurelius; while seated beside Bossy, in lieu of observing the rising foam, let him ponder the sources of Tschaikowsky's "Pathetic Symphony"; returning to the house, let him analyze the cause of higher rents in Shepherd's Bush and give up thinking how heavy is the pail. These are suggestions in the rough, inspired by one book; deeper students than I of the employment of leisure could supply the farmer topics for the remainder of the day. In an age when utility is an idol, it passes belief that governments have neglected to issue bulletins on the employment of rural leisure.

Do you think I mock at improving the spare moment? Then you catch me wrong. I admire it with all my heart. But when one is born a constitutional idler—It is in these odd moments when I see the sun setting, or the clouds massing, or a haze coming off the river, or the moon climbing

over the trees, that I am most recompensed for living, that I more clearly perceive the beauty in life and in the homely things around me, that I somewhat effect "the adjustment of conduct to principles." Conserve the forests, guard the water supplies, start crusades, but leave to my own using, I beg of you, masters, my spare time. Permit me to spend my coppers riotously.

If this be wrong, you must not blame me; you must blame the landscape of Indiana.

XIII

A SERMON

YOU accuse me of being a sentimentalist. Doubtless I am; most farmers are; I hope I am. You, also, are a sentimentalist, else you would not turn the leaves of this book. Do not stop to argue with me; I have a story to tell you.

Some months ago I read of a prisoner arraigned before a judge for stealing a common article of food,—a loaf of bread, shall we say? Remember the thief had been starving. You do not know what starving means? Then go without dinner and use your imagination. "It is necessary to live," spoke up this Jean Valjean in defense. "I do not see the necessity," replied the judge.

There you have it! All the smiling sentimentalism compressed into one sentence. Does it stick in your gorge? I acknowledge I think it rather a neat retort to be swallowed without a grimace. Certainly, the judge is a man worth knowing. I would like to make his acquaintance. He is a smiling sentimentalist. On his way home that even-

ing, I imagine he bought violets from the flower girl.

Patience, reader, I have a moral for you; hear me through to the end. If you are a weeping sentimentalist, you are in tears by now and I can do nothing save entreat you not to splash the page; if a holder of the other belief, you are, of course, in smiles, and I warm to you. Give me for a companion (and for a reader) one of this latter breed; an out and out smiling sentimentalist who wears his moods on his sleeve and joyously pursues the Will-o'-the-Wisp of his fancies; a man of quirks and humors, a hard hunter in wild goose chases. You know him by his high spirits; he comes with gifts of mirth; the sun ever shines upon him, his mouth is empty of axioms; he looks on the bright side of the picture; he flings up his cap; he is brisk as a bee and jolly as a thrush and playful as a kitten; he is merry over a tumbler of water; he says grace before a crust; he takes the good the gods provide; he does not inquire into your business or into your health; he dances a jig; you can never put your finger upon him. Yet are you vexed, he soothes you; sour, he sweetens you; dull, he enlivens you; grieved, he comforts you; lonely, he cheers you; down-hearted, he perks you up; sad,

he makes you laugh. How he does these marvels, he least of all knows and cares least. The fairies rocked his cradle and he learned their songs. Do not be deceived by him. Behind his smile is hidden a heart as heavy as yours or mine. His eyes are not blind; make no mistake, he sees keenly as you or I the dark side of the picture, the wretched smearing of colors. Of this, mercifully, he is silent.

Behold the weeping sentimentalist. He enters with a sigh and stays to groan. "Are you well this morning, my dear? I thought you appeared pale." The sky darkens when he comes. He is a plague, an irritation, a bore. He unloads his burden of woe in the center of the carpet, and like a peddler would have you handle each article and inquire the price. His presence calls for smelling salts. He professes to bend to his yoke, to stomach his meal, to grin and abide, to submit with resignation, to be stoical, to pour oil on the troubled waters, to exhibit the patience of Job. He is a croaker, sunk in the dumps, a wet blanket, a crippled bird that cannot fly; he is a thorn in the side, a dagger in the breast, a burr in the hair; he grates on the ear, sets the teeth on edge, goes against the grain, adds a nail to your coffin. He thins his wine and wears overshoes; he asks for a fan or requests that

the door be closed. He desires to learn if you wear flannels. He is going to a funeral or coming from a sick bed. He says the market is weak and demands your opinion on the times. He will not eat rich desserts. He believes our modern composers are inferior; he is unable to read the new books. He sighs for the olden days. He thinks the corn crop is a failure. Wheat is showing badly. There is no money in farming. The winter will be severe. It will rain every day in the spring. The summer will be hot. The picture is a mess of daubs. His eye is moist; he has a handkerchief in his hand. He sniggers. When he laughs, it is on the wrong side of his mouth. He weeps over a wilted flower. He leaves you prostrated. He deserves a kick. Yea, he needs a kick.

"It is necessary to live."

"I do not see the necessity," replied the judge.

To be sure, there is no necessity. But while we live—we are all sentimentalists of one kind or the other—why, let us make the best of it and *live*. And that is the moral of this sermon.

XIV

CONCERNING GOSSIPS

IN my youth I was swayed by a paragraph. As I remember, it began in this fashion: "There are three kinds of people: those who talk about ideas, those who talk about things, and those who talk about persons." The pert saying pitched me on my pride. I resolved to talk about ideas. The paragraph assured me I would find a smaller but more select company in the first division of the world's inhabitants. I resolved the more firmly to talk about ideas. My conversation would not sink me into the vulgar, overcrowded third class. Forthwith I joined the mental patricians. After a week I was dumb and gasping for ideas. I could find few companions, and those I encountered, though they were select, suffered from my affliction. We had little to say to one another. True, each of us possessed a favorite idea which he dragged around like a cannon. Mine was the elevation of the working man. It went off with a great bang and considerable smoke, but so far as I know never

brought good or harm to a laborer. The opening shot often received applause, the next fell flat, and the third, even among my selected companions, was the signal for the thrusting of fingers into ears. Very familiar with our ammunition, we grew to avoid one another. We must have been intolerable asses. I am astonished that we were not hung in a row. Perhaps the circumstance at this time of my removing to a manufacturing town and becoming a working man saved me from the fate I merited. In a factory the mind deals all day with things. Before I knew I had lost caste, my conversation after hours dealt with things of the day. I rebelled and set up a censorship. To no avail. I had found my second-class companions more congenial and my pride could shift for itself. From this retrogression to my complete downfall the story is short. Enthusiasm over one's means of livelihood dulls with time; the day is enough, I found; of an evening one desires to talk about something else, so one talks about persons. One gossips.

Because I am now a farmer it may be I am settled so comfortably into the third class. I, who consorted with the cannon shooters, have learned to love gossips and am glad to be reckoned among

them. I claim my right to a pert saying, and divide my fellows into those who make gossip an art, a recreation, and a business.

With the artist gossip, though I recognize his virtues, I am ill at ease. I can seldom forget that I mounted backward to his kind; I remember I am not born of his strain. He comes to my house as to a banquet, and is served meat before soup. My manners shock him. I linger on a morsel that he passes; I bolt the dishes he tastes; I open bottles that are not sufficiently cooled. I am no connoisseur. He eyes me disdainfully, and leaves early, his face showing indigestion. When I visit him, ceremony rules. I am treated to dainties that fill but do not satisfy: my palate yearns for roast beef; I am given spiced tidbits. I must peck and dally and starve amid plenty. His service may be silver, his cloth linen, but there is no camaraderie at his board. His loving cup is bitter.

With the gossips for pleasure I am free and easy. An hour with them is an hour afield with merry hunters. There is no telling when a bird will flush, whither it will fly, who will bring it to ground. The coverts are beat, and neither Jack nor Jill knows what game may issue. Shouts and hallooings and laughter there are, but not cross

firing, and if you score a miss, no cries of ridicule. When you weary of the chase, you may drop out and find a spot to rest. Presently, another of your mind will sit beside you in that most delightful of companionships—the intimacy of two gossipy souls tête-à-tête. The shadows lengthen and the hunters return all too quickly.

With the serious gossip who makes his play a business, I have scant sympathy. His treasure-chest is ever locked; his eye squinting for a bargain. He wishes to trade with you. Now the nature of gossip demands that it be given spontaneously and received lightly; it is foam, a bubble, thistledown; place a value upon it, begin dickering and hectoring, and the fun of the game departs, the joy of the gift is gone. He is an exasperating creature that mocks your generosity, that takes and gives not, that hoards like a crow, that brings shame upon the worthy clan of gossips. Banishment to a desert isle is due him, and perpetual silence.

To be a lively gossip for pleasure evidences an open mind and a cheery heart. Ideas are fine enough to unfold on paper to the confusion of understanding, but the things that people do and the things that people say are the materials from which ideas grow. In the country, news of the world stirs us

gently. We read the papers and marvel at the activities of strangers, but when the paper is folded, we wonder what our neighbors do and what they say. Yes, farmers are excellent gossips.

XV

WHY FARMERS COMPLAIN OF THE WEATHER

TWO moments ago I said profoundly that enthusiasm concerning one's means of livelihood dulls with time. I hasten to exempt farming. Ask your nearest farmer. He does not exhibit his feelings for benefit of the casual, but induce him to talk and he will tell you:

A man is or is not born a farmer. He often drifts by chance or by opportunity into law or medicine or politics, but he comes to agriculture because he cannot help himself. There is in him a domineering love of the soil, its smell, its feel, its look, that renders him happiest in the furrow. He can no more stay away from the land than a lark can avoid the sky. He recks not if men win greater fortunes in cities, if their hours of labor are shorter, their amusements numerous, and their hands manicured. He does not pause to consider; he does not care. He finds a recompense in

his fields. He must have the soil about him; he must walk on it, work in it, live on it.

Your farmer will not tell you this at first. He will fend you off with trifling reasons. It is a healthful life; he is his own master; he practically produces what he consumes; he makes his money out of earth and air and does not snatch from other men; his business is with necessities, not with luxuries and gim-cracks. Press him, and he will fall back upon his love of animals and his delight in beholding growing crops. Press him further—and here you must be wary—and he will say he tills the soil because he cannot do otherwise. I doubt if he will explain the statement to you. Do you ask the artist why he is an artist? Then why pester the farmer with silly questions?

To my mind he has the best of the artist who struggles with dead materials for living results. Your farmer works with living materials. He is an agent in the creation of life, and I can imagine nothing more quickening. He lives with nature. He does not write books about it, or compose music, or paint canvases, or carve stones about it. He actually does the thing. What nature is, neither you nor I know. We have our theories, and mine, derived from farming, places the chief concern of

man in conquering nature. I have read the same in more than one book, but I meet people who have not heard the theory. To them, bread grows in the baker's shop. They do not experience the satisfaction of seeing beyond the counter. They have never touched the austere spirit of nature. If there be sorry jokes under the sky, this is the sorriest.—Indeed, I think the farmer has the best of all other workers.

Is he not an interesting figure from the car window, this man who goes out alone to labor, who spends his days in silence and his life in company with nature? His bent back throws on the landscape a shadow of protection. We glance over the plots and groves and are pleased and wonder where is the keeper. We may come this way again and desire to be charmed afresh with the vista. Ah, there he is, at work as usual, patient and dumb as his horses. Clap him upon the shoulder, and inform him he lays the foundation of the nation's economic structure, and he will appear impressed, but not overcome, and will complain of the weather. I could never determine, until I became a farmer, what he found in his fields that he could labor so persistently.

Do you remember the old German legend of the

vineyard owner and his sons? The father came to die, and dying, his last words were, "Dig in the vineyard; there lies the treasure." The sons digged furiously and long, but they found not the gold. The legend says they discovered their treasure in the vines' greater production of grapes, but I prefer to think they found the recompense your farmer finds in his fields, and that is content. Why should delving in the soil give content? I do not know.

When your farmer complains of the weather, remember he has nothing else of which to complain. It is his expression of enthusiasm.

XVI

A REFUGE

I AM glad the domestic animals cannot communicate with us by speech more fluently. This rejoicing, I hope, does not evidence a churlish disposition. I take a delight in the bark of a dog, the whinny of a horse, the mewing of a cat, the looing of a cow. In translating these articulations I find the pleasure of the scholar who turns to his language passages of the ancients. A dog can inform me when he is angry, happy, anxious, playful, ashamed, dejected, afraid. It is known by his voice when he is boasting, whimpering, telling the truth, and telling the other. (Unlike humans, how seldom does he do this last!) The horse expresses that he is hungry, glad to see us, that his humor is aroused, and what not. Have you heard the shriek of a horse in pain, you will remember it long. Cats I do not trust an instant. To me they are born deceivers, and when they make a sound, it is to wheedle me from my chair or otherwise to damage my comfort for their profit. Cows are

stupid and will bawl unintelligibly for an hour over nothing. Pigs are frankly for food before everything, and their uplifted voices ever bear the same plea. Chickens are selfish and foolish, and speak of little beyond their accomplishments.

I risk the charge of contradiction when I profess a satisfaction in understanding the speech of these animals so far and another satisfaction that the understanding goes no farther. I do not, as some parents of innocent babes, find amusement in the efforts of inexperienced tongues. It is not past belief that the amusement of the parents evolves from a sense of their own more finished performance. I do not consider the dog inexperienced. His tongue, in his language, is as agile as my tongue in mine, and, no doubt, his grammar is as good. I hope this contradiction does not mean I hold myself superior to conversation with these beasts. I admire their intelligence. In many matters I prefer their judgment to mine. More than once a horse has brought me unerringly home when I have been lost in the night; a dog knows better than I where the quail are; cats do not watch by the wrong mouse hole; cows in new pastures straightway discover the juiciest grass; the fattest pig is a peerless example of the survival of the fittest; hens, it is merely

fair to state, are more familiar with the laying of eggs than I.

Then why the inconsistency of wishing a half understanding, a currency of speech that expresses some things but not all? It must be that I weary at times of uncurtailed discourse with humans. They have a reply to all I say. It is impossible to propound questions beyond answer. In their company I have not the joy of talking without interruption. I am constrained to take a care what I speak, for they remember what I said yesterday. If I talk too freely, they think me loose-witted and they have remarked as much. If I am silent, they think me morose and sulky. Unless I watch unceasingly, a word on a tender subject slips, and scowls follow. How different with Sam and Hank, the two Percherons, companions of my labors! Honest, big eyes they have, and wide foreheads, and sensitive nostrils, and attentive ears. They are listeners—or affect to be. Seldom they say anything. We disagree at times on how much corn a horse should nip in the field, but the argument does not run to words, and they or I accept defeat without complaint. I am not fully aware what they think of me, or what they say when I am not near, but Sam and Hank nicker if I enter the barn, and

I can lay my hand on them when they run free in the meadow. There is no conqueror's attitude about this. We simply understand each other.

I thank God it is possible to have understanding without excess of words. If you know the silent joys of a walk across fields with a dog—no! not at heel, but ranging, doing five miles to your one, appearing, disappearing, coming in to learn if all is well with you, leaping away to new discoveries—if you know the comradeship in this, surely you also must rejoice in the companionship without speech with animals. It is a refuge from human society.

XVII

CAMP MISSISSINEWA

HE was a man who laid down his life for the community. Not in one splendid, blazing deed, but day by day, unostentatiously, in his doctor's office, where he labored to alleviate human suffering. To help others, he drove himself beyond endurance; health for his patients he won, his own he lost in the winning. When, worn and exhausted and ill, he left Noiram last summer for a long postponed vacation, he said to my sister D., "You will never see me again."

He loved the country. On the river farm my father owns, he built Camp Mississinewa, and there when Sundays released him for a few hours from the crowded office he went to rest among his beech trees and to renew his strength among his flowers. To my mother he said, "When I die, I want you to have Camp Mississinewa."

This afternoon she and D., and I drove to the lower farm. The November day wavered between

tears and smiles, and I, of the same mood, remembered the times in the past years the Doctor and a bank clerk, encountering on the streets, had stepped aside from the intrusion of pedestrians to exchange brief words of yearning for the open sky. I was that bank clerk. I hope there are pleasant streams and sounding beech woods and Camp Mississinewas where the Doctor has gone.

The beeches were bare and the river running its autumn volume, but within the cottage we found his Camp as he had left it. The orderliness prevailed of a man who took abiding pleasure in his home. The beds were trimly done, the lamps filled, the chairs drawn to the table, utensils on their shelves, magazines stacked; a folded towel was above the washstand, matches were in the holder,—everything awaited the Doctor's return, ready to do his bidding. A poster on the wall held my attention, a hunter of the high North facing with unslung rifle the wolf pack that is loping down the trail of his snowshoes. The wolves will charge: that the waiting man knows, and the end is near. Yet he stands up without fear. I think such is the way the Doctor stood always. And he fought for others while he fought for himself.

On the bank of the river before the house was

an iron settee. Upstream, the water slipped hurriedly around the bend and rumpled over the riffles, then smoothed to a quiet stretch as it passed before the bench. I could imagine the tired Doctor sitting here in the peace of summer Sabbath evenings, forgetting for the moment his office in Noiram and the succession of ailing bodies that on the morrow would come demanding.

"Shall we carry the settee into the house?" asked D.

"Yes, by all means," I answered. I was glad she proposed it. I did not care to think of any wandering idler sitting in the Doctor's seat.

We entered the barn. A blanket for his horse was laid across the stall partition; the halter hung on its nail, the pitchfork stood in its corner, the bin contained corn. He cared tenderly for his animal.

I descended the wooden steps to the river, and drew up his boat from the water. The stream came singing over the shoals, but I did not attempt to interpret the song. Across the water white boles of poplars picketed the shore. They had long watched the Doctor in his placid enjoyments, and I wondered if they and the beeches above would miss him as would the people of Noiram.

Ordinarily I avoid the haunts of departed men. To-day I felt the Doctor would have wished me to attend to things, and as I locked again the doors of the tool house and the kitchen, I regretted there was not more I could do to prepare Camp Missisinewa for the winter.

D. closed the house, and we three walked to the gate along the driveway edged with boulders. The flower garden plots were laid over with straw, the pots for geraniums were empty of their plants. He had protected his flowers from the cold. We paused at the gate to look again at the little house on the bank of the river where a weary man came on Sundays to fling himself on the earth and be rid of weariness.

"I think the Camp is worth more than all the rest of the farm," said D.

"A woman's way of thinking," replied my mother. "I think so too."

XVIII

KING WILLIAM

KING WILLIAM and I went for a ride this morning. King William professes town breeding, has a superciliousness toward the country, remembers his grand circuit ancestors. To me he offers a semi-respect, a half-pitying condescension. I have not always lived out of cities; some day I may mend my ways.

A swollen hock gave us on the farm the honor of King William's company. He arrived one day from the stable in Noiram, limping, but carrying aloft his head, and rolling a disdainful eye upon the scene. We turned him into the small pasture and left him to himself. He stood facing Noiram, intent on the factory smoke clouding the crest of the hills, and seemed unaware of the grass beneath his feet. Of the Jersey cows that introduced themselves with bucolic simplicity, he was oblivious. He annihilated them with disregard. Finally, he turned his back and sniffed the turf. "Hum!

What is this?" he said. "Raw grass? How coarse a food!"

The hock improved under the treatment of the pasture, and this morning I invited him to a ride. He accepted nonchalantly, with no great expectations. He has many moods; I have seen in him everything but sullenness. One time when I tendered him a bit of candy filled with soap, he was angry for a week, and twitched his tail at mention of my name. It required many unimpaired lumps of sugar before we were friends again. He has a canny sense of humor. To-day he was facetious. "King William in the country?" he snorted. "A jest!"

He feigned alarm at rural sights. A pig, starting from the lee of a fence, sent him to his haunches; a chicken waggling across the road caused his legs to tremble: he who in town will approach panting steam engines, was dismayed at murmurous leaves. Once in the open road, he tentatively stamped his feet, and finding the hock in condition, he stepped out on a square trot. King William has no ignoble opinion of King William. He considers himself the last word in horseflesh, and this morning yearned to prove the boast. But I was not so sure of the joint, and soon I coaxed him to a walk. King William fidgeted and bore

against the bits: this was demanding a deal from blue blood on a frosty morning. If he is a creature of whims, so am I. At this moment it was a whim of mine to go softly with an ear attentive to the music of the saddle. The day was between late autumn and early winter. A skiff of snow whitened the ruts and the fence corners; a drift of thin clouds streaked the sky. The sunshine was frosty, the air filled with a dry tartness of cold. When one breathed, something aromatic and electric washed the lungs and pulsed through the veins. The world had not yet awakened to lively business. There was no sound save the smack of King William's hoofs on the frozen pike, and the music of the saddle. I have never grown to love the cowpuncher's saddle, its forty pounds, horn and cantle, and swelled fork. Under certain conditions, with certain horses, its use is taken for granted. This I allow my adversaries and no more. I will not argue further. (I have lost friends before on the issue!) I merely state that any man who holds the Spanish saddle makes sweeter music than the English has no ear for leather music. Between your knees, pigskin becomes melodious, stirring up the ancient, wild impulses that underlie our tameness, bringing the senses to revel more turbulently in

frosty sunshine. It sounds the cymbals of the out-of-doors. I knew a girl—how she could ride!—who slept with her saddle hooked over her bed-post. Silent music of adventure at hand. She understood.

Snobbish King William hearkened to my discourse, but would not admit that wild impulses ran in his veins. Some friendly colts, sighting us from a corner of their pasture, galloped to the fence with eagerness to make acquaintance. King William trod aloof with never a glance at the forward ones. "I am not as you," said his worship's manner, "*I* will never draw plows or stumble over clods. I live in town, and possess a box-stall."

"Shame upon you, King William," I reprimanded. "A box-stall does not make the horse."

Neighbor Peeler was in his barnyard as we drew near. Neighbor Peeler and I argued one day on the origin of the Morgan breed. Neither of us proved correct in knowledge: since then we have been sworn friends. He came to the gate, reefing up the ear flaps of his cap.

"Thank you," I remarked.

"For what?"

"Preparing to hear my words of wisdom." I reefed my flaps.

He smiled and tugged at his beard—a warning that he will hurl a killing shaft.

"I wish to give you every chance. Superior animal, there."

"Yes; very superior. He snubbed your colts down the road. All because he lives in a box-stall in town and eats oats."

"Oh, give him time. He hasn't been among us long. He will get over the oats theory."

Along the fence where fallen leaves blanketed the earth, the grass still showed green. King William pawed with a forefoot, and pleaded like a sucking colt to be given his head. I slacked the bridle reins, and with a sigh of satisfaction he bent a knee and began eager cropping.

"You see," remarked Neighbor Peeler, "he is learning."

Within the barn, a horse whinnied. King William raised his head and replied, telling of his discovery of green grass.

"As a snob, King William," said I, "you are a rank failure."

Before we parted, Neighbor Peeler and I decided that most snobs are failures when they find green grass in the winter time.

XIX

TATTERS AND PEGGY

HE is so very humble I marveled how he managed to keep himself alive. Humble he is, and a dog, and yet—Do I enter the house twenty times a day, he waddles from his pillow in the corner of the living-room to greet me with wagging tail and licking tongue. A friendly word brightens those loyal eyes, and extinguishes for the moment their unutterable sadness. Poor Tatters! He was born without the fighting spirit, the hardness of heart, the icy selfishness that manufactures success. Had he been a man, he would have worn frayed trousers and a shiny coat, and whined through his nose when he spoke.

He was in his corner when I came to the farm. He humbly besought my favor, but dared not approach. Expectant of rebuffs from strangers, he cowered when I passed. He thumped his tail humbly to my back; did I turn, the tail quieted, and he humbly begged pardon for the presumption. Our friendship did not progress rapidly. He appeared

so useless, so squashed of soul, asleep all day on his pillow, his fat body shapeless as a bag, I had nothing for him but pity. His eyes confused me; I I could not endure their sadness—the sadness, I thought, welling up from knowledge of incompetency. By chance one early morning, I discovered him tossing a stick, romping and growling. I paused and he barked an invitation to join the game. Then began an endless sport of hide-and-seek with bits of wood, stones, and bones. To the scandal of the housewife, Tatters and I collected an equipment for these pastimes which we deftly concealed under furniture and rugs, and had out for the entertainment of an evening. Little by little his tail lost its down crook, his head its sag; courage came into his eyes and now, when he feels the call to play, he advances boldly upon me, and thrusts aside my newspaper. He would not follow me through the gates of inferno; but if I reappeared, he would be waiting for me at the gates with wagging tail and loyal eyes.

"You have put nerve into Tatters' humble backbone," Joab remarked the other day.

"Yes?" I returned. "I have often wondered how you happened to own him. He does not square with your sense of the fitness of things."

"You wish the story? Here it is. When I was a youth, I owned a real dog. An Irish terrier; Shamrock was his name, and a masterpiece of pluck through and through. I used to brag of what the dog would do for me. One night in a bar I boasted that Shamrock would even bring out a coin if I threw it into the fireplace. It was talk on my part, but money was laid, and I tossed the coin among the coals, and told Shamrock to go fetch. He scattered the fire, and brought the coin—and that night we had to kill him. Yes, I had been drinking. But that did not heal Shamrock's burns. Next day I swore no other dog should ever suffer through me, and every dog that has come to me since then has found a home as long as he wanted to stay. Tatters came, an outcast, with an empty belly. Not much like Shamrock, is Tatters, but he is welcome to remain."

In the most comfortable chair of the room reposes Peggy, the Maltese cat. There is no humbleness here. She demands and receives the cream of attention and returns indifference. I never knew a creature who cared less whether my life continued or ceased. She will sit at my feet during meals, and accept morsels dropped when Martha is looking the other way; should I grow negligent in these

devoirs, Peggy will remind me with unsheathed claws, but ten minutes later, if we meet in the yard, she shuns me utterly, and to my spoken blandishments condescends no recognition. Tatters does not exist to her; I do not exist save at meal times; Joab merely when he milks; and Martha so long as she bides her place and does not push acquaintanceship to familiarity. Peggy is self-sufficient. Her fur is never rumpled, her face is always washed, her green eyes are never disturbed. The world is her shuttlecock. Were a second flood to come, Peggy would board the Ark as a matter of right.

"Traps catch mice, and do not scratch. Explain our possession of the independent Peggy," I requested Martha.

"Her possession of us? Once upon a time there was a girl who was very wicked. A little girl, but very wicked. She had a kitten, which sometimes she carried by the tail and dangled over the flowers that the kitten might enjoy their fragrance. In time the kitten enjoyed too much fragrance. Since then I have tried to be kind to cats. Peggy strayed here and I kept her. You mustn't tell Joab this; he likes to tease; he wouldn't understand."

"Of course; he wouldn't understand," I agreed.

XX

MY EYES ARE OPENED

TO-MORROW will be Thanksgiving. Martha had no sage for the turkey dressing; this afternoon I volunteered for service to Noiram. Turkey without sage dressing? Never! Martha would grieve herself until the year rolled completely around.

"You will drive one of the horses?" she asked.

"No, I shall walk."

She raised her eyebrows to half circles. She has learned it is useless to argue with me; her brows now express her opinion of my decisions. Excellent person, Martha, albeit a trifle set in her way, and convinced she does not rule my irresponsibilities with as iron a hand as she would, were I not so irresponsible and set in my way. Do you recall the problem, "when two bodies of the same weight and the same momentum meet, what happens?" Martha and I are an answer. Nothing happens. She continues to peel potatoes, and I, with the air of victory, prepare to leave the lists.

She summons me to return; she, the defeated one, commands me to halt.

"What are you going after?" she inquires.

"Sage, ma'am," I meekly answer, all traces of victory abandoning my countenance.

"And what else?"

"Oh, yes, and what else? Do you not know? That is a question."

"It is."

"Oh yes, and what else? That, in a manner of speaking, is the question."

"In a manner of speaking, it is."

"Joab said he wanted to be reminded to tell you that the spotted calf——"

"He told me after dinner."

"And he said the turkey weighed——"

"So I have heard."

"And the snow will help the wheat."

"Such is the belief generally held."

"To-morrow will be Thanksgiving."

"The President has decreed it."

"You are a difficult person to converse with. Difficult and disagreeable. I think I must hurry along now, please, ma'am."

"What are you to bring?"

"Sage."

"And what else?"

"Cloves."

"No."

"Cinnamon."

"No!"

"Nutmeg."

"No!!"

"I fear they do not keep it in Noiram."

"Keep pepper? Would you mind asking?"

"I'll ask if I sneeze for my boldness. Be calm, lady."

As I go to the door, she adds, "Don't bother about the pepper. I never mentioned it before. And don't forget to wear your gloves."

I would have replied, but occupied with buttoning my coat, I can think of nothing that pleases me, and exit in Olympian silence. Excellent person, Martha. Some day I must convince that woman of my superiorities.

A fall of snow last night had whitened the country. The hillsides were blanketed, the straw piles sprinkled, the roofs of the barns painted white. The fences were inked against the yellow, plundered cornfields. Through the bordering thickets, at the base of the bluff, the steely river glinted sharply like a twist of metal. On the distant hills the sunshine

lay mellow and warm, mingling its gold with the dulled, old browns of massy, removed woods. The nearer trees were black in the sky, each branch and twig defined upon the blue. Over everything was that hush the snow brings to earth. A blessed balm to the raucous grindings and racketings of cities! Surely, the snow must come from heaven.

When I reached the gravel hill, I paused to view again the farm. The familiar road led quietly between the fences to the stone posts; a fragment of red wall shone between the trunks of the sugar grove; a pillar of smoke mounted without a waver from the hidden chimney. I rubbed my eyes and opened them to a clearer understanding. "Joab was correct," thought I. "There is beauty on this farm. There is beauty on the other farms of Hoosierdom, and the next complaining Hoosier I encounter shall hear from me."

Muttering "Sage and pepper," I climbed the hill and proceeded to Noiram. A mile further, where the road forks, a burly pedestrian stopped me. He was cheery and smiling and wore his hair short. I would not have imagined him an artist.

"Can you inform your servant which road goes to the Frazier Farm?" he inquired.

"If you will follow my tracks in the snow, they

will lead you to the gate, through the gate, and to the door. Within you will find Martha, who is flushed with victory. Convey to her my respects, and say 'Sage and pepper!' The pepper, you understand, is for luck and not for the dressing."

"It shall be done. I perceive my quest becomes easier."

"How so, sir?"

"I am an artist. I paint pictures of corn and sheep and other things. I have a painting I wish to frame in fence boards—time-weathered boards, gray and worn, with the mosses and lichens. The owner of the farm told me to help myself. Will Martha understand?"

"Yes, Martha will understand," I answered. "We must give her credit for that. Are ancient fence boards—ahem!—beautiful?"

"Sir, if you open your eyes, anything is beautiful."

XXI

BETTER THAN BOOKS

WITH my purchases bulging a pocket, I sought the public library of Noiram. Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia," a poetic romance well accorded, I am told, to while winter evenings, was my quarry. "Here now have you (most dear, and most worthy to be most dear lady!) this idle work of mine, which, I fear, like the spider's web, will be thought fitter to be swept away, than worn to any other purpose," began the dedication.

"A sensible opinion of one's efforts," I reflected, and my glance fell upon a little pamphlet at my elbow. "The World's Best Books" quoth the cover, and I burned to scan the columns. My hand halted as it advanced. "Why, after all," was my thought, "should I plague myself with what I have not read? Books are my friends, not my masters. I do not make a list of human friends to meet, I will not make a list of books to read. Culture for culture's sake may do for some; to me, give life for

life's sake. Was it Alphonse Daudet who wrote, 'so many things are lost in that journey from the brain to the hand'? If he, the sensitive observer, confessed this much, I will not enter a library to gather my observations: I will see with my own eyes. Man, this afternoon did you not, as you walked to town, discover for yourself that the detached shadows of trees and plants falling on the snow in sunlit open spaces are blue and not black? No new discovery to many, perhaps, but to you startling and fresh. What in 'The World's Best Books' could give you more joy? To you the world shall be the best book. You are a farmer on your native heath; you can, if you will, see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears. And when, of an evening, you come to your book with mind freed in the air from other men's opinions, you may condescend to your author, not he to you, and smile when his prejudice and his ignorance run wild."

Thus I cogitated while "Arcadia" and "The World's Best Books" awaited me.

"Have you read this?" asked a pale student across the table, thrusting forward a bulky volume.

"Is it one of the world's best books?" I inquired.

"Of course; I read none other. A wonderful book, very true to life."

"Do you not find life truer to life?"

"What has life to do with books?"

"I ask of you."

"Nothing. Books are art."

"And life——?"

He smiled as to a child, and continued to pore upon the page.

"You whippersnapper," I flung at him mentally, "sucking thoughts through your spectacles, bah! I would not exchange the American farmer (upon whom rests the safety of the Republic) for all the bookish men of earth. You parrot!"

The sun was down and the young moon brightening in the sky when I cleared the town and trod the creaking country road. Snow crystals sparkled along the fences like bits of mirrors, the telegraph wires overhead hummed "Cold, cold, cold," my breath streamed like an exhalation of smoke. In the farmsteads, black blocks on the white uplands, the lights of supper burst forth. As I hastened by the lower pasture, I spied the glow from Martha's kitchen, and then other windows luminous with welcome.

"Can there be a light in the parlor?" I asked of myself. "What does that mean?"

The unaccustomed light meant that Martha with her sleeves rolled to the elbow, and Joab with his hair awry and valiantly whistling his tune, and the artist with his coat removed and his eyes flashing, these three were laboring in the parlor. Gone were the bags of seed wheat and sense of desolation and must of the past. Rugs were on the floor, curtains at the windows, on the hearth were andirons and a leaping fire. The three at last saw me standing in the doorway, chin fallen, mouth wide.

"This is Mr. Thompson," was Martha's introduction of the artist. "You passed him on the road this afternoon. His mother married an uncle or a cousin of mine, or other way around, I forgot which. Anyway, we have the same name, or at least we did before I was married, and if one Thompson can find anything beautiful in old fence boards, I guess another Thompson can find something beautiful in fixing up this parlor. Gracious! I must go look at my biscuits. Joab, pull that table a little more to the center of the room. Mr. Thompson, shouldn't this picture be hung over the mantel?"

I fixed Joab with a stern eye.

He smoothed his hair and coughed behind his hand. "To-morrow will be Thanksgiving," he prophesied.

"Yes," I agreed, "to-morrow will be Thanksgiving."

XXII

THE REASON

THE end of these disintegrated sketches comes; I wonder what my experiences as a farmer have taught me. Though I wrote for my own amusement, conscience demands recapitulation, and I must sum up and add the moral. I do not seek to proselytize; I have no new truth to vend. All that I have learned is so evident, lies so thickly on each man's doorstep, that I blush to write further. This knowledge is commonplace and trite, yet I meet men to whom it is as the sun of to-morrow. Comedy would supplant tragedy if these men walked with happy hearts. Do they?—I have encountered not many contented people on the road of my life. Of these few, the most were farmers.

I have said before I do not know why delving in the soil should bring content. This I know: the parasitic life that clogs city streets is not the life that satisfies me. While slums endure, I cannot believe that cities are the highest expressions of men's efforts. And the stone residences? I am no

Socialist; I merely pity the worried owners. Luxury debases as surely as poverty, and material possessions stifle as certainly as hunger kills.

It has been remarked often that happiness, for which we all search, springs from within and not from without our bodies. I see many persons surrounding themselves with books and paintings and china and silver, and crying, "I am happy!" Are you, brother, are you? Convince me, and I also shall strive for marble palaces. Others I meet who drug themselves with work. They, too, cry, "I am happy!" But are they? . . . I ask with the utmost sincerity. Do they satisfy their inmost longings? One and all, they appear to me to be hunting fretfully for something they have not found. I have spoken with the moderately rich, and I have worked for months in offices without raising my head from the desk. In one life I perceived a bitter pride in books and paintings and china and silver; a pride insolent and cowardly, or stupid and inarticulate, that closed the doors on varied human companionships and adventurous fancies. In the other life I found a sterile joy that sickened with the completion of each task and fattened on heart's blood.

In the soil I found something ancient and tested and good. It takes nothing from the worker save

his strength, and, having taken, returns with interest. It recreates the man. He is living life at first-hand, living,—feeling, tasting, seeing, smelling, hearing,—accomplishing his own perceiving, not acquiring perceptions from other men. I glorify the physical sensations? Ah, that is the curious part. Under the sky, the sensations of the senses are glorified. I do not know what God is; I doubt very seriously if you know. For myself, I think God is not found so readily in theological seminaries as in country fields.

If you come to the fields for an hour, or a day, or until death, you must come with "the simple faith of a child." Wisdom will not aid you; least of all, wealth and honors. Your heart must be humble; you must labor; and if you find not everything, you will find, I hope, content.

THE END

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